University of Alberta

Acting on Difference: Dialogues in Theatre and Feminism

by

Siân Williams

A thesis submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts

Department of Drama

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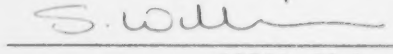

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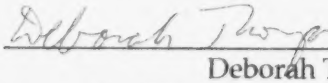

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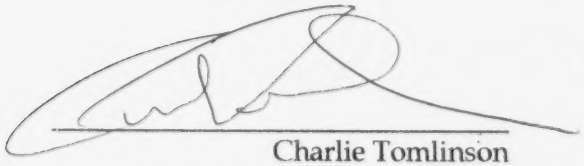

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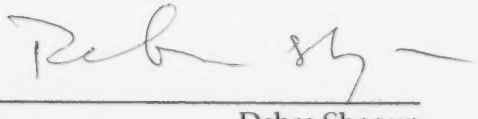

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Abstract

This study starts from the premise that theatre is a site par excellence for cultural study. Specifically, I am interested in the study of differences among women. I will be exploring this terrain through the examples of three theatrical pieces: The Book of Jessica, by Linda Griffiths and Maria Campbell; Women's Circle, a collectively written piece under the direction of Jan Selman; and Sally's Rape, developed by Robbie McCauley in collaboration with Jeannie Hutchins. With a chapter dedicated to each project I will be examining the ways in which feminist theories of difference were performed, both consciously and unconsciously, throughout the creation, performance and participation stages of each piece. I will be focusing on the differences across race and class specifically. I am looking to locate both the reflection and disruption of cultural assumptions within the theatrical process, especially as they affect relationships between women.

Acknowledgment

I want to extend very special thanks to the two women who were most influential in the writing of this thesis: Jan Selman, without whom it never would have begun and Debby Thompson, without whom it never would have ended. Debby's dedication to the completion of this work has been as valuable to me as her editorial support.

Thanks to Debra Shogun, my external reader and Charlie Tomlinson, my second reader, their comments and input enriched both the process and the final product. Thanks also to Tom Peacocke who was unable to be at the oral defense.

Although it is impossible to credit every person and experience that led me to the ideological underpinnings of this work, there are some that need a specific mention: my parents, without whose support I never would have traveled this far; all of my professors and colleagues at King Alfred's College, especially Michael Etherton and Anna Kline; my professors and fellow graduate students at the University of Alberta, especially Valerie Shantz; the members of Women's Circle, Jan Selman, Jane Heather, Edith Mitchell and Sandra Nicholls; and finally, Jonathan Christenson, who continues to challenge and support me in equal measure.

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INTRODUCTION

> It is one of the privileges of art that it allows us to wear our disguises with impunity and without fear of reprisal. It is true both of the artist and of the audience. Art allows for representation that is conceived in the imagination free of any constraints (except those willfully employed by its creator), and can thus travel through the limitless expanse of intercultural space with an open-mindedness that invites others into its domain. . . . Art that moves us and speaks to us always carries within itself some degree of our personal representations, either of what we have been, or wish to be or not to be. . . . In all instances, what cannot be denied is that art as a culture, and more so than other cultures, by being so integrally linked to ideas of representation, identity and the socializing process, is the advanced standard bearer of interculturalism.[1]

As Gautam Dasgupta eloquently highlights in the above quotation, art, and for the purposes of this exploration, specifically theatre, is a gold mine for those wishing to dig deep into the tensions implicit in identity politics.[2] In the following chapters I will be exploring identity politics and feminist theories of difference through three theatrical pieces: The Book of Jessica, by Linda Griffiths

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1 Marranca. 329.

2 In using the term body identity politics I am drawing upon the work of cultural critics, such as bell hooks, who both utilise and problematise the term. Body identity refers to the 'physical fact' of difference, such as skin colour or gender. It is also problematised to identify that beyond physical fact these differences have been used to construct difference and identity in a binarism of 'self' and 'other'. In this way, the identities of 'white woman' and 'black woman' carry a significance far beyond the skin colour that the language implies. Such identities move into the realm of cultural identification.

and Maria Campbell; Women's Circle, a collectively written piece; and Sally's Rape, developed by Robbie McCauley in collaboration with Jeannie Hutchins. Each of these three pieces is founded on theories of difference between and among women, specifically theories relating to race and class. I will be using these three pieces to illustrate how cultural assumptions are reflected, disrupted and reformed through a theatrical process.

Theatre, as an art form, is consumed by the process and product of constructing and (re)presenting image and identity. In the same way then that no theatre can be apolitical, because its very creation necessarily stems from a personal conviction of some kind (be that even the conviction to create a mindless entertainment form), so too no theatre can be freed of the processes of both creating as well as commenting upon identity, including our societal struggle to find ways of naming ourselves and, more importantly within the scope of this work, placing ourselves in reference to others. Bonnie Marranca writes in her introduction to Interculturalism and Performance that "theatre . . . takes as its subject *representation*" (italics hers).[3] For the purposes of my exploration here I would like to expand "subject" to include not only the *content* of theatre but its processes of creation, its textual representations (however temporary) and finally its reception by both audience and critics.

So, what identifies theatre as a ground on which to explore cultural trends and responses, particularly in regard to body identities and their representations? Firstly, I believe that any art form is an expression of the societal milieu out of which it was created. It can, therefore, be used to reflect back cultural movements and moments. Secondly, the creation of theatrical characters (realistic or otherwise) that differentiates theatre from other art forms is a process of "giving voice" to prevalent thinking. The dynamics involved in

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3 Marranca. 13.

exactly *who* is given that voice on our stages runs in direct parallel to an analysis of the voices being heard outside of theatre. It is only via reflections of ourselves that we are able to form or ascertain our identity, which includes the positions of power that such identity affords us relative to the 'others' in our lives. Theatre holds a vital role in that continuous but ever-changing reflective surface of society that determines the directive flow of power based on presently embraced identity. Thirdly, I would like to believe that as well as (unconsciously) revealing current identity trends through the creation of theatrical voices, theatre has the ability to challenge, even alter, those trends through the offering of alternative identifications, more readily accepted first on a stage before moving slowly outwards into societal structures. In this way theatre acts as the "advance standard bearer" that Dasgupta refers to.

Throughout this study I will be using the term 'identity' in a particular way, a way which may be counter to its colloquial usage. Colloquially, 'identity' is seen as something stable and innate. I, however, refer to, and understand 'identity' as something that is constructed. For the purposes of this study I will be referring mostly to identities that are constructed throughout the theatrical process. However, in a larger context, this process of construction is one that I see extending far beyond the walls of the theatre as well as preceding the theatrical creation.

My working hypothesis is one which has been widely argued by contemporary cultural theorists, as well as implicitly by many theatre practitioners: any category of body identity is a constructed concept.[4] As constructions, however, these categories carry limitations. The limitations come

4 For examples see: Ruth Frankenberg's writings on the construction of whiteness as a specific, if often invisible, race identity. Frankenberg argues that t the privilege that a reality such as white skin colour offers creates a position from which to enter into any discourse and that this position can be identified as 'whiteness'. I use this example because all too often, as Frankenberg is pointing out in her book, definitions of racial identities revolve around non-white, hence perpetuating the sense that white is a non-colour, a non-race.

from the implied homogeneity that is an inevitable part of categorising people according to constructed identity. Once a line has been drawn and a title given, such as "woman", then there follows an implication that all women share in the same history, present and possible future. This implication is referred to as essentialism. It leads to the problematic necessity of having to stack identifiable categories in order to get a more accurate sense of the heterogeneity that lies beneath the constructs: 'white, working-class woman', for example. The very word 'construct' evokes the image of something solid and supported, but identity is far from this. It is shifting and ever-changing, it is a concept that is adapted from one situation to another exactly because it is always in reference to something 'other' than itself.

Although identity categories are deeply problematic, they are both necessary and useful. Throughout this work I will be using them tentatively and with an awareness of their limitations. I will be drawing heavily on three particular and familiar categories and the identities that ensue from them: gender, race and class. More importantly though I will be using these three identity categories to look at the *differences* that lie among and within them. I want to examine the space that manifests between people who have assumed opposing identities, hence separating and differentiating one person from another. Specifically here I will be focusing on the ways that this space has been traversed by theatre practitioners. In order to examine this space, this place of difference, there has to be some definition what frames the separation: this is where identity, although problematic, has to be used. As I stated above, I believe that all identity is constantly being constructed: we all carry and perform many and shifting identities with us daily. Despite the danger of simply perpetuating rigid and inadequate lines of separation it is vital to use and reference those very lines if there is to be any possibility of negotiating them. For example, in order to

enter into any dialogue regarding the social construction of race, categories such as 'white', 'black' and 'of colour' need to be used to define the areas of examination. To engage in a dialogue of difference (and commonality) we require something that defines the areas of difference, if only so that those areas can begin to be troubled and problematised with the hope of moving to a point from which the difference can be seen as a positive space rather than a negative one.

I find myself, as someone attempting to enter into the fray of cultural theories, simultaneously recognising the need for categories of identity whilst acknowledging their limitations. I also find my own changing positions in relation to identity categories to be reflective of larger-scale movements in feminist theory and practice. Initially in this arena it was important for those excluded from dominant cultural representations to legitimise differences that were categorised under such headings as race, gender, sexuality, class, ethnicity etc. (To identify as a 'lesbian woman', for example, as the dominant representation of woman implied heterosexual). However, the usefulness of these categories is coming to an end. In opposition to the original desire to clarify, these labels are no longer about difference as much as *absolute* identity categories. So this is the struggle facing cultural theorists and it is the struggle that will continue to play itself out in the following pages. I am looking for ways that language can recognise real and necessary differences but move beyond holding them in stasis. I am also looking for the ways that words such as 'difference' and 'commonality' can be truly and thoroughly explored without being reduced to a convenient shorthand; convenient because the use of the word allows us to ignore the dynamics that underpin such theories, requiring the existence of the word in the first place.

As a part of this struggle I am constantly reassessing my own relationships to the identity categories that I have mentioned above. Primary to this reassessment is a definition of the privileges that most of my identities afford me. It is the awareness of this privilege and the desire to understand how it affects my relationships with other women that drives my examination of the work that I encounter in the way that I am doing throughout the following chapters. I am a white, middle class, heterosexual, well-educated woman. Other than the final one each of these identities seem synonymous with privilege. I should state that I am also an artist and a feminist, both of which place me slightly to the edge of a mainstream sensibility. Because of my feminist inclinations I am engaged in the above dialogue of difference from a very particular position; I am interested in the ways in which women whose identities have dictated very disparate experiences find a meeting ground from which to examine those differences, as well as the commonalities they experience. I am trying to stay attentive to the ways that my positions of privilege both hinder and further that dialogue.

If it is my feminism that leads me to an examination of relational dynamics between women then it is my theatrical identity that leads me to theatre as the location of that dialogue as well as the arena within which to observe and document cultural trends. And there are a very particular set of cultural trends that I am hoping to use this study to document. These trends apply equally to theories of race and feminism and can be seen as parallel movements running through the development of theory in both of these areas. For the purposes of defining this movement I will be tracing an artificial chronology in the next few pages. Although on a broad-strokes cultural analysis there may actually be a chronological time line that parallels this trend (such as the changes in feminism over the past twenty years), it is more realistic to see this

movement as an ever-present, ever-shifting dynamic that is constantly in flux between cultural groups, as fluid as the identities that are defined within these groups.

This cultural movement, then, begins with a belief in the possibility of a united voice and a bonding on the grounds of similarity and shared experience. Within feminism this is most closely associated with a movement and a politic that referred to 'sisterhood': a bringing together of *all* women under the shared umbrella of a challenge to patriarchy. Helena Michie expands the family metaphor inherent here, encapsulating the hopes of this time when she writes that ". . . the figure of sister protects a new, feminist family by suggesting that the family of women is capacious enough to contain all women no matter how different from each other they may appear to be."[5] However, as Ruth Frankenburg points out in the introduction to her analysis of the construction of whiteness, it was women of colour who first began to publicly question the possibility of such a 'sisterhood' through their accusations of a continued racism present within the North American feminist movement:

> . . . it seemed as though we white women had a limited repertoire of responses when we were charged with racism: confusions over accusations of racism; guilt over racism; anger over repeated criticism; dismissal; stasis. Feminist/radical women of colour would also, it seemed, go through phases: anger over racism; efforts to communicate with white women about racism, despite it; frustration; and the

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5 Michie. 3. Michie is involved here in problematising a concept of 'difference'. She documents the move from locating difference between genders (the origins of feminism) to locating it between women. The danger here is that feminism turns away from addressing issues of patriarchy.

temptation (acted upon temporarily or permanently)
to withdraw from multiracial work."[6]

As many women felt themselves to be excluded (and not just on the grounds of race) from what was being revealed as a white, heterosexual and predominantly middle-class movement, the universal and essentialised concept of 'woman' became more troublesome. In reality the 'woman' of feminist thinking, the 'sister' that would protect the feminist family, referred only to the dominant representation of women.

What followed was a process of " . . . translation of difference from the space on the other side of the gender market to places between and among women".[7] As women came together to share their experiences of patriarchy it became more and more obvious that those experiences were radically different from each other, with these differences representing the heterogeneity of other identities that women held. An ideal such as sisterhood ran the risk of absorption into a hegemonic structuring of sameness that offered only one representation of woman. The challenge to this absorption was one that involved using more specific identity groupings that spoke directly to the experience of those most closely connected to them.

Women, particularly those working within feminism, came with a prefix or suffix to distinguish them from one from another. Hence a 'black woman' was differentiated from, and more importantly assumed to have different allegiances to, a 'black, lesbian woman'. As I stated above the specificity of these identity categories as well as the labels that were attached to them were a necessary and legitimate part of a development process. This stage of the process threw into sharp relief the differences that lay between (in this case) women as these

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6 Frankenberg. 2.
7 Michie. 4.

differences became more complex, defining ever narrowing experiences.[8] In every case the movement was towards a sharper definition of who 'we' are in the face of otherness; 'other' came to represent an inability to comprehend the experiences of 'us' and was therefore something to be dismissed as representational only of a dominant rhetoric. This was a period of binarisms that placed oppositional forces onto all relationships. The danger, and the reality, was a fractured feminism, one that under the umbrella of sisterhood referred either to an illusionary, dominant representation of 'woman' or to no woman at all.

One example of the result of this stage of the cultural movement can be seen in Canada's national women's platform - the National Action Committee on the Status of Women. This organisation acts as an umbrella advocate for hundreds of Canadian women's organisations. Over the last few years, for the first time in its twenty-five year history, the organisation has had a woman of colour, Sunera Thobani, as President. Despite the progress that this seems to suggest in Canadian women's identity, her term of office has not been an untroubled one. Frequently coming under attack for too prominently prioritising the inclusion of women of colour in such organisations, her position represents exactly the tension implicit in feminism having to reconfigure the understanding of 'woman': in representing all Canadian women she sees the inclusion of women of colour as a primary objective, but other feminist leaders feel that this is an isolation of race from the other issues facing women.

The third, and as yet final, stage of this cultural shift is perhaps the most difficult to define because it is the place where we presently find ourselves as feminists, theatre workers and cultural observers. Due to our proximity it is

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8 Thanks to Debra Shogun who pointed out here the irony of my own use of the identities "black" and "lesbian" to describe a "narrowing" of experience. This seems to imply that experiences are "narrowed" away from the dominant representation (in this case of women). In reality the experiences of a white, heterosexual woman are no less narrow (or broad) than those of a black, lesbian woman.

impossible to step back far enough to examine this cultural moment with the same distance and context with which we can view the previous stages. But there are certainly features about it that are obvious even from this distance. There is a recognition of the essentialised nature of the extreme identity categories, along with an acknowledgment that unless these categories get small enough to only encompass the experience of one person there will always be an element of false representation about them. Alongside this there is a recognition of the artificiality of a structure of binarisms that reduces everything to an oppositional construct; in this case to an 'us' or 'them'. "The orderly march of thesis antithesis and synthesis is disturbed here by the ubiquity of difference. . . . meaning shows itself as multivalent, subject to the shades and shadows of difference, a matter of circumstances, feelings, and perspectives - plural - not privilege."[9] Difference is no longer something that has to be seen as a force of alienation but something that has the ability, when shared, to unite, even to expand, our understanding of the hegemonic structures of our world. Again, I return to Helena Michie for her writing on the inevitability of difference: "difference between women can not be contained, no matter how refined, how small or how specific the operative category. No political or physic (sic) marker . . . can exclude division, conflict, duplicity or multiplicity."[10]

So this is where we find ourselves: in a place of uncertainty. The only signposts are those that tell us that difference is inevitable and that to deal with that difference we have to reconstruct our familiar approaches to 'otherness' and the binarisms within identity. We need to find the ways that transgress the differences; locate the dialogue in the spaces 'in between'; discover the language in which that dialogue can be held. This will be a process, not of eliminating

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9 Chaudhuri, 205.
10 Michie. 4.

difference, but of finding the ways that difference can be an acceptable part of the heterogeneity inherent within a definition of 'woman'. There are no immediate or apparent answers as to how this may be done. However, as I trace in the following chapters, particular works of theatre are beginning to grasp this challenge. They are struggling to find ways to experiment with the shape of this new dialogue on stage.

So far there are two obvious threads to this work: the identification of theatre as a site of cultural observation and intervention, and the theoretical trends through cultural movements such as feminism. Essentially, then, what is being put into practice in the following chapters is a recognition of theory in performance, or 'performing theory'. 'Theory' is being used here to define ideological assumptions and the ways that these assumptions impact upon approaches to both other people and the work. 'Performance' is being used both theatrically (i.e. an actor on a stage) and to mean the 'acting out' of particular assumptions in a non-theatrical way. In this way 'performing theory' can be the staged presentation of two characters, one black, one white, involved in action that represents their differing positions based on their racial identities. However, performed theory could also be two women, one white, one Native, meeting for the first time in a coffee shop, relating to each other (however unconsciously), with a knowledge that their race affects their reactions to each other. In both cases the underlying ideological assumptions about the racial (in this case) identities of each woman affects the relationship. It is this interaction between assumption and the way it effects action that I am terming 'performing theory'.

In addressing the three individual theatrical pieces I will be looking to identify: when theoretical assumptions about gender and difference are absorbed through the creative process into the construction of characters represented on stage; and when the theatrical process disrupts and reconfigures these theories.

At its most simple performing theory can be identified as characters on stage recognisably voicing and/or re-scripting (through their words and behaviours), specific theoretical points of view.

This description of performing theory can be complicated in two ways. Firstly the theories that are being performed are not necessarily consciously held. I will be looking for areas within each of these works where the theory that seems most obvious in its performance is exactly that which is least recognisable to the participants. Secondly the performance of theory is not restricted to characters and their representations on stage; I am suggesting throughout the following chapters that often the most revealing performances of theory happen between the collaborators themselves during the creative process, or between the actor/creators and the audience members. These are times that are not consciously 'performed' in the traditional understanding of theatrical performance but are loaded with the representation of theoretical assumptions. 'Performance' in this instance is being used to identify acting out, representing, acting upon and/or playing out constructed identity roles. Any combination of conscious or unconscious theory being consciously or unconsciously performed is possible.

The division between these theories and the performing of them is an artificial one, used here for the purposes of definition. Theory is not formulated in isolation but as a result of cultural observations; once posited as theories their realisation can be further observed, along with the exceptions to the rules and new behaviours that lead to a reevaluation of the theory. This is an ongoing, cyclical and reciprocal process in which neither the theory nor the cultural behaviour it documents can be isolated one from the other. It is this very process of exchange that I am documenting in the following chapters: locating that exchange within the theatrical processes.

I will be using the above relationship between performance and theory in one very specific way: to look at a theory of female identity and the way that these identities create a connected theory of difference.

To illustrate what I am referring to here I want to pull an example from the first piece that I will be using in Chapter One, The Book of Jessica. At the very end of a 100-page chronicle of the fraught process that was the development of Jessica Linda Griffiths and Maria Campbell give voice to Paul Thompson, the third collaborator, who comments that:

> All the frustration and the potential for mistrust fueled the future work on the play, underscoring its themes of racial tension . . . . It also propelled Maria and Linda into the transcontinental dance of understanding/misunderstanding that is at the core of their chronicle. . . . The story of Linda and Maria's journey has become a fabulous tale of its own. In fact, it would make an interesting play.[11]

Thompson is pointing to the theatricality of the dialogue that has taken place between Maria and Linda. In the very act of theorising about their performance they have been further performing that theory. Thompson recognises the ever-expanding possibility of the theatricality and the ever-present to-and-fro between the performance and the theory.[12]

Another example of this same process, from a different angle, is the beginnings of the second project that forms the basis of Chapter Two. The Women's Circle process started out of a belief in the feminist theory of the

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11 Griffiths and Campbell. 109.

12 What is not clear from the layout of the text is whether this is *actually* Paul Thompson's addition to the dialogue, or whether this "Voice from the Middle of the Room" is a creation of Linda and Maria's. If the latter is true then this adds the further layer of their own recognition as to the performative nature of this dialogue.

personal as political. So there was always a theoretical foundation to the work that was created with a very conscious trajectory towards performing that theory through the representations of characters whose lives were parallel to some kind of a theoretical predicament. In this way the characters represented a particular theoretical standpoint on stage. In this instance then the theory was the forerunner to the performance: all of the performances offered under this model were highly theorised. There was a constant process of personal positioning in relation to the work, in relation to the other collaborators and in relation to the work in front of an audience. (What I will be coming back to in the course of Chapter Two is the times within this process that went untheorised, yet were equally performed examples of theories of difference between women.)

To look at yet a third example, Robbie McCauley, the subject of Chapter Three, would suggest that the foundational connection between the moments of theorised performance and performed theory is dialogue. And furthermore that dialogue itself is performance. Dialogue is the cornerstone to her performance as well as to the theory that is implicit within it: both the performance and the theory are best represented as the interchange between two people rather than the separate ideas that those two people hold.

In the three examples given above there are very different areas of theatre identified as the site of performance. I want to spend a moment here clarifying the stages of the theatrical process that I see myself using in the following chapters. I am choosing to include within the theatrical process collaborative writing, performance, finished script/text, audience response and retrospective reflection (from any distance) on the entire process by those most closely involved. I have chosen these five areas to look at specifically because I feel that the presence of difference and the conscious or unconscious theorising of it can shift quite radically within the same project depending on which stage of the

theatrical process is being focused on. A conscious performance within a finished script may stem from a process of collaborative writing that was unaware of its performative aspects. This shift in and out of consciousness is one that I am particularly interested in tracing. The reality of the three pieces under examination is that each one has different elements of the process that interest me more than others. For this reason too it is beneficial to be able to isolate one area from another.

This division of the theatrical process also allows for a shift, a transgression, through varying communities of women in the course of one project. To use Women's Circle as an example, there were times in this process when a collaborative writing team of four or five was expanded to include a group of women from a specific community who would respond to the central issue developing within a scene, assisting in the writing of it. This usually took the form of sharing their own life experiences, allowing those stories to be used as a basis for a scene. Later in the process this same community of women would be involved in re-watching the completed scene as audience members and participants. With an example such as this I wish to explore the potential for different theoretical performances between all of the women involved depending on their roles at each stage of the theatrical process.

The theatrical process is obviously not as easily divided as I have indicated here. These artificial lines are for the convenience of academic study only; in reality the creative/performative process is particularly fluid. At least two of the examples used here were or are involved in an ongoing creative 'writing' process that is directly impacted by the audience responses to the performances. The dividing lines between the ending of one phase and the establishment of another do not exist in reality.

Contrary to many traditional theatre rehearsal processes and productions, each of the three pieces here did not start from an impetus to mount a pre-existing script. Herein lies the first clue to their position within a feminist discourse, as in each case a new 'play' had to be written in order to present the female voices that the creators wished to see staged. To state that each project was placed within a feminist discourse does not deny that this location was of varying levels of consciousness among the collaborators involved in each project.

A second commonality that points to their feminist viewpoint is the fact that they are each a collaborative process, essentially, between women. (I will address Paul Thompson's role in Jessica in a moment). Both the commitment to hearing women's voices on stage as well as the commitment to a collaborative, non-hierarchical process speak to me of processes stemming from ideological assumptions that align with feminism. To varying degrees this ideological starting point was one consciously concerned with a theory of difference.

Only one of these projects, Women's Circle, actually flew under the banner of 'popular theatre'. I wish to avoid a lengthy and digressive definition of popular theatre here, but I do think that it is noteworthy (also, connected again to a discourse of feminism) that each of these projects used very personal experiences as the basis of the dramatic writing.[13] Whether taken directly from the collaborator/performers or from other women in the community this process is faithful to one of the foundational tenets of feminism: the personal is political. These stories/dramatic representations were used to pass on information to an audience that would initiate a dialogue around social issues, specifically the relationships between and among women in the community.

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13 A useful definition and survey of Popular Theatre, as it relates to a Canadian context, can be found in Ross Kidd's article "Popular Theatre and Political Action in Canada". In addition, some of the foundational theories and methodology of Popular Theatre are documented in Boal's Theatre of the Oppressed and Friere's Pedagogy of the Oppressed.

Despite these fundamental similarities between the three pieces there are significant differences that make them an interesting comparative study. I want to take the time here to describe the projects in some detail.

Chapter One focuses on a Canadian collaboration, primarily between two women, Maria Campbell and Linda Griffiths. I say primarily because the improvisation/writing stage of this process was led by Paul Thompson, a director known for his 'collective' theatre. Specifically Paul was recognised for his belief in Documentary theatre, a form that saw actors observe a community for the purposes of recreating the community characters and events on stage.[14] The Jessica process was to follow that model: Linda, a white actor, would improvise and write a piece of theatre based on the life of Maria, a Metis activist and writer.[15]

The result of the improvisational and writing stages was the play Jessica, which had its first production in Saskatoon in 1982, continuing on to be an award-winning play with a highly acclaimed run in Toronto.[16] However, it is not this result that I am most interested in here. Following the production of the play Linda and Maria entered into an eight-year dialogue (including extended periods of silence) in an attempt to understand what had happened to their relationship during the research and writing phase of the creation of Jessica. The result of this dialogue is The Book of Jessica, a part narrative, part dialogue that traces their process and enters into a personal analysis of it. It is this book that Paul Thompson's earlier quotation is referring to in his suggestion that *it* be the subject of the next play. Picking up on his observation of the performative nature

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14 For a comprehensive introduction to Documentary theatre, including Paul Thompson's "The Farm Show", see Filewod's Collective Encounters. Also Barnet, "Out of the Collectives.".

15 Throughout this work I will be referring to the women involved in the three pieces by their first names. Although this may feel somewhat familiar, especially in reference to those that I have never met, it is the format that I am most comfortable with as a compromise between the formality of surnames and the awkwardness of using the names in full each time.

16 In 1986 Jessica won the Dora Mavor Moore Award for Outstanding New Play; was runner up for the Chalmers Award; and won Best Canadian Production at the Quinzanne International Festival in Quebec City.

of their dialogue, it is The Book of Jessica that will be most closely used as a reference point for Chapter One.

I see the dialogue contained within The Book of Jessica as offering a rarely obtained chance to observe the in-depth dynamics of the creative process. As Thompson points out, this dialogue is also an excellent example of performed theories of difference between two women as they attempt to tell the same story (or their individual stories about the same events). Moreover, it offers a retrospective analysis of this 'performance' by the very women involved in it, including their attempts to understand why the relationship had been so painful. This reflection in itself sets up another location of performing theory. The double time frame and the double identity that the two women hold in The Book of Jessica allows for an in-depth examination of the variance in performing theory at different times of the process.

Due to most of the focus of Chapter One being The Book of Jessica, as opposed to the play, Jessica, I will be employing slightly different methods of examination in this chapter than in the subsequent two. Firstly, the audience referred to in this section is essentially the reading audience of The Book of Jessica. In both of the other chapters I will be focusing quite heavily on the relationship between the performers and the audiences, particularly as both of the other pieces involve the audiences in a more participatory manner. In comparison to this the audiences that witness(ed) the production of Jessica took a more traditional role as merely watchers of the play. (At the original production in Saskatoon the audience members were unusual however in their representation of a non-traditional theatre-going crowd, as the play targeted largely Native and Metis communities. Once the play was produced for a second time in Toronto the audiences were more mainstream in their racial and class demographics). Given then that the 'audience' of The Book of Jessica is a

readership more than a traditional audience their responses to the dialogue will not be as easily accessible.

I will not be excluding Jessica the play, from this examination. But I find it impossible to look at the play in isolation from the knowledge of the process of creating it. This is part of the cyclical nature of the theatrical process that I referred to earlier and comes as somewhat of an added bonus to this particular piece. I see the character Jessica as possible adding some insight into Maria's assumptions upon entering this process. But, given also that Jessica's experiences are told partly through the representation of a white writer/performer, the character represents the complexities that are present in Maria and Linda's dialogue.

The written and published format of The Book of Jessica also gives it a permanence that the other two pieces do not have. Although the nature of the relationship between Linda and Maria suggests that their dialogue is ongoing (although fraught and painful), I will be dealing only with the documentation that is evident in the book, as I lack the means to move beyond that. This can imply the sense of that dialogue as something completed and resolved, which I do not believe to be true.

Finally, it is my focus on The Book of Jessica that justifies minimising of Paul Thompson's role in the process; essentially it was the dynamic between the two women that was the impetus for the retrospective writing. They minimise his presence in writing about the process. This does not mean either that he was not influential to the process or that his role is being erased. For my purposes, however, I am most interested in the way that this process comments on a theory of difference between the women, specifically their attempts to overcome the gulf that opened between them. Much as they choose to 'background' Paul, so do I.

In this introduction to The Book of Jessica I want to point to one curiosity that will be explored further within the following chapter. During the research/writing process of the play it appears that the focus was a traditionally theatrical one of 'get the play up': the performance was of the highest priority while the theory that was being enacted seemed to go relatively unnoticed (at least in as much as it was consciously *theorised*. Its presence was very obvious in the tensions that it caused). Conversely, in the dialogue that followed during the ensuing four years the understanding, the *theorising* of the differences between the two women became the focus while the performative aspect of this theorising was overshadowed. In a study of performing theory I find this attempted separation of the two, theory and performance, a fascinating and understandable desire. I am curious to further examine whether this separation is a true representation of the processes at play here and to compare it to the sister pieces in Chapters Two and Three.

The beginnings of Women's Circle seem to suggest a clearer relationship between theory and performance. Even in the description of the project as a popular theatre piece there is some recognition of a theorising that the founding members thought could be addressed through theatre. The project was initiated by Jan Selman, a university professor, popular theatre practitioner and director. Jan's immediate concern was to create a piece of participatory theatre that allowed an audience to be involved in a genuine dialogue around a variety of concerns that she felt were being named by women in various community groups. She collected together a group of women who were all involved in theatre as writers, directors and performers. Together they set about the task of writing theatre that would be relevant and vital to women.[17]

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17 To date the Women's Circle project has been limited to Edmonton, Alberta. Both the artists and the audiences were drawn from Edmonton.

This group of women was to change radically over the next five years as the project went through many phases, always with Jan at the forefront. She remained the only person to have been consistently involved throughout the history of the project. In 1994, as a graduate student of Jan's, I was hired by the Women's Circle and joined them as a writer/performer. It is this phase of the process that I will be focusing on in Chapter Two because I was privileged enough to have complete access to the workings of this stage of the process. I observed a microcosm at work as we struggled to make theatre that stayed relevant whilst being vigilant to the differences that were arising: among ourselves as the creators as well as between the group and the audiences we approached. The other women involved in this stage were Sandra Nicholls, Edith Mitchell and Jane Heather.

The ways in which the members of Women's Circle interacted with other women are numerous, with the potential for feminist theories of difference to be performed present on each and every level. The writing process engaged by the Women's Circle involved women from different self-identified community groups spending time in workshops with the creators and using theatrical means to come to images and stories that were taken by the theatre group to be used as the basis for scenes. As many of the community groups were identified around such titles as "immigrant women" and "women in poverty" there was an interface of difference at this primary stage.

Due to the attempt to keep the material involved in Women's Circle performances current and constantly relevant to an immediate audience, there was an on-going process of writing, rewriting and creating new material. There was no neat division of the theatrical processes, often with new pieces containing political information that was being reported that morning. The format of the show was a series of short scenes that could be played in any order or

combination, with a linking start, finish and transitions. In this way the scenes that most closely related to any given audience were the ones that were performed that day. Very rarely was the entire repertoire used in one show.

Foundational to the concepts behind Women's Circle was a participatory model. All of the scenes established a character who was facing a seemingly irresolvable crisis, dilemma or decision. Many of these 'crisis points' came from stories told in the earlier workshop phase of the project, as such reflecting genuine dilemmas faced by women. At the critical point in the scene the written action would stop. The character would turn out to the audience to begin to animate and facilitate a discussion about how this problem may be addressed. At this point the actor remained in character using all of the character history that was revealed in the previous scene, plus additional information that was predecided or improvised depending on the need. The task of the animator was always to create discussion between herself and the audience members and if possible among audience members themselves. In this way the participation served as an exchange of information and a site of dialogue. In the context of this study the complexities of actors engaged in dialogue, as characters, with an audience that is specifically being asked to address feminist issues offers up a wealth of examples of theory being performed.

As is the way with many popular theatre events there is very little public documentation of this process. I have in my possession all of the scripts that were used in the final stage of the project. Only one of these was ever published, in an earlier form, in Canadian Theatre Review[18]. There is also an accompanying interview with members of the Circle that I will be using as reference. However, most of the observations and investigation into this process that will take place in Chapter Two are based on my own involvement with the Circle. This approach

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18 "The Red Dress". Canadian Theatre Review. 69 Winter 1991: 12 - 14.

results in more subjectivity than is evident in the other two chapters. It also allows me to look more closely at the process as I have access to all of the women involved alongside firsthand knowledge of the ways in which theory was performed at each and every stage.

In contrast, the focus of the third and final chapter, Sally's Rape by Robbie McCauley and Jeannie Hutchins, is a piece that I have very little information about other than a transcript of one performance, an interview conducted with Robbie and the reflections of one audience member.[19] In this case I will be drawing heavily upon the published transcript with the knowledge that it only represents one evening's performance of the show. Sally's Rape follows a format that sees the performers move in and out of scripted material and improvised dialogue. The dialogue takes place among themselves and between themselves and the audience members. This reliance upon unscripted material is one reason why a transcript can only capture one performance, but in addition the creators regularly alter the scripted material for future shows on the basis of audience responses. No two shows can ever be the same. It is problematic within this study to use just one show as an example of the entire run of Sally's Rape. However, I feel that the importance of the work that Robbie and Jeannie are involved in and the relevance of Sally's Rape to a study of performing theories of difference is too great to give up the chance of using it.

Sally's Rape is the story of Robbie McCauley's great-great grandmother who was a slave 'owned' (for the purposes of the play) by Thomas Jefferson. She was raped by her slave master. Robbie is descended from the child that was a result of the rape. It is this history, including the way that a white woman such

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19 This audience member is Debby Thompson, who saw the following performance: "Sally's Rape and Persimmon Peel: An Evening of Performance with Robbie McCauley, Jeannie Hutchins and Laurie Carlos." DiverseWorks, Houston, 22 May 1993. Sally's Rape was directed by Robbie McCauley, developed in collaboration with Jeannie Hutchins, performed by Robbie McCauley and Jeannie Hutchins. Persimmon Peel was an improvisational duet by Laurie Carlos and Robbie McCauley.

as Jeannie fits into this history, that is at the core of Sally's Rape. Both of these women are interested in how they recognise that history but not allow it to divide them in a way that is irreconcilable. This theatrical piece and the dialogue that it gives rise to is fundamental in their attempts to understand and move beyond the differences that isolate them. In this way performing theory is a conscious tenet of the theatre that they create.

In addition to my lack of resources surrounding this production is my distance from the immediate issue that Robbie and Jeannie are addressing: African American/white relations in America. The other two pieces included in this work are Canadian and deal with differences between women that I feel are very present in my life. In looking towards an American piece as the closure of this work I am aware of the possibility of accusations on the grounds of venerating American work above Canadian: looking south of the border when equally relevant examples could be found within a Canadian context. However I am not interested in setting up a competition between these three pieces as much as using them to illustrate different approaches to theatre that is conscious of its potential to put theory into action. Any comparative references will be for the purposes of understanding this concept further. Within the construction that is this thesis I am very excited about the possibility of establishing somewhat of a dialogue between these different pieces, no matter how artificially this is created by me.

In initially choosing these three projects I saw them as loosely following the three progressive stages of feminism that I outlined earlier. I had thought to structure each chapter around the theatrical piece's location within the movement. Hence I saw Jessica, at least the original process of creating Jessica, as representing a period of 'sisterhood'. I saw Linda and Maria involved in struggling to overcome difference, striving towards some kind of unity.

Women's Circle was to represent the time of segregated women's groups. The work of this project was to overcome the large barriers that difference had effected between women who were working in isolation from each other. Finally I saw Sally's Rape as a project that is finding a new way through difference, finding ways to acknowledge and embrace difference without erasing it. Although this kind of a location had been my original intent with each of these chapters I am now aware of the impossibility of such firm divisions. Each one of these projects speaks to the nature of cultural shifts being that of a series of concentric circles. Parts of each of these stages are present in each project and no one theatrical piece clearly represents any one stage of the cultural movement. Such is the nature of cultural movements and such is the nature of theatre.

One final note about this dialogue before I launch into it: as I have outlined above, my personal connection to each of these processes and the availability of material for each of them is very different. As such a different style will emerge as I approach each chapter. Although this inconsistency may be problematic in a strictly traditional comparative study, I would prefer to look at it as an asset here, as each of these works will take on a different voice in the dialogue that is about difference. It is a dialogue centred on women, the differences between them and the ways in which those difference get performed. I am interested in the way that the theories of feminism and difference that I am exploring through this work begin to play themselves out in my own work. I am certain that my work will continue to be a stage for the interplay of theory and performance. Inasmuch as this work can be considered a performance and I am playing a role through the writing of it, performing theory will be a constant presence in this writing. In this way, each of the following chapters is an extension of that performance as they continue to represent, play out and act

upon the dialogues present within The Book of Jessica, Women's Circle and Sally's Rape.

Chapter One - The Book of Jessica[20]

> The Native people were practical enough to realise that a venture of this size usually had some white people in it.[21]

> Linda: Every time I'd go at all that Native stuff I'd be cringing inside. To have the 'subject' in the room, plus, they're Native and I'm as white as the driven snow, the clouds on the prairie, whatever. I mean, it's outrageous when I think about it. I can't believe we did it. I can't believe you sat through it.[22]

From the time that Linda Griffiths and Maria Campbell met (1980) to the time that their conversations were recorded in The Book of Jessica (1989) is a period of Canadian history that marks a huge cultural shift in both feminism and Native activism. This was a shift that saw Native communities putting up greater resistance to white involvement in their affairs, governmental and cultural. The writing of Jessica happened on the precipice of a Native autonomy that saw Native theatre companies form and a backing away of white theatre

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20 Many people were influential to the formation of the ideas in this chapter. Primarily they are: the members of Debby Thompson's Drama 622: "Interculturalism and Performance" class (Winter 1994); the members of Debby's Drama 690: "African American Drama and Critical Theory" class (Fall 1995); and Kathryn Bracht, whose seminar presentation and paper were partly the inspiration for this chapter.

21 Griffiths and Campbell. 52.

22 Griffiths and Campbell. 33. The text of The Book of Jessica is represented in two ways: there is the narrative text that Linda Griffiths wrote and there is the transcriptions of the dialogues between the two women. This difference results in times when just Linda's voice is being heard, times when Linda's voice is interrupted by Maria and times when the two are in equal dialogue. In order to identify the difference between these moments I will be laying out these excepts in a similar format to the book, so that any quotation that fills the width of the quotation margins is directly from Linda's narrative and anything from the transcriptions is indented with a name to identify who is talking. In this way hopefully it will be clear which of these quotations come from conversations and are directly addressing the other woman and which are Linda's narrative.

practitioners from Native issues and content.[23] (Predominantly these practitioners were working in areas of popular theatre, as Native content was still mostly invisible in the mainstream theatre).[24] In a similar move, although for slightly different reasons, this period of time also saw women's groups isolate themselves from each other more and more on the basis of specific identity categories. Women, disillusioned with the erasure of difference that feminism was effecting, began to identify in smaller, ever more absolute categories.

The theatrical process that The Book of Jessica reflects upon took place on the cusp of that cultural shift as from 1980 - 1982 Maria, Linda and Paul improvised and structured the play Jessica. The reflection and dialogue that Maria and Linda are involved in throughout the book happens in the midst of the radical cultural changes that were taking place and are influenced quite significantly by them. This reality provides a layering to the conversations in The Book of Jessica as Maria and Linda reflect back on the process and a time that, culturally, has already passed. They attempt to understand that process for themselves relative to the cultural conditions that exist as they talk: conditions that are in some ways less sympathetic to the process that they were engaged in at the time of writing Jessica. This layering is represented by the opening quotations: simultaneously Linda is recognising the Native community's acceptance of white involvement at the time of the production whilst reflecting on this in a tone that seems to suggest her and Maria's naiveté in the face of the

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23 An example of this kind of move is illustrated in a profile of Alanis King-Odjig, the Artistic Director of De-ba-je-mu-jig Theatre on Manitoulin Island. Founded in 1985 (in the middle of the extended Jessica process), the theatre's mandate includes "reclaiming the history of First Nations from their viewpoint". In founding the company King-Odjig was committed to a specific process: "we decided that we had to research our own people and traditions, it is an exploration that hasn't stopped". Aboriginal Voices. Perhaps the most famous Native theatre company in Canada is Native Earth Performing Arts. Founded in 1982, Native Earth came to national, and international, attention when the then Artistic Director, Thompson Highway staged a production of his own play The Rez Sisters in 1986. The international success of The Rez Sisters and the attention turned on Thompson Highway and Native Earth marked a definite shift in the reception of Native theatre in Canada.

24 Due to the nature of many of these projects documentation of them is either non-existent, or hard to find. However, Jan Selman's account of working in Pond Inlet and Fort Franklin with the Inuit and Dene communities is one such project. In "Three Cultures, One Issue" Jan refers to the effect of white culture on these small, traditional communities as she documents her popular theatre work there.

political and cultural changes that were already upon them. In my look at this discrepancy, or interaction, between the process and the way that it is contextualised in reflection, I aim not to identify the 'truth' behind Maria and Linda's retrospective dialogue, but rather to explore how the tensions that existed around this piece, both at the time of the creation and in the reflections, were, and are, related to larger cultural shifts which are mirrored in The Book of Jessica.

Many of the dynamics that were a part of this project were facilitated by the structure of the creative process. Maria wanted to learn how to create the kind of theatre that she saw Paul Thompson directing, thinking it would have some use in the community-based work that she was involved in. When she approached Paul he suggested that she discover the process by going through it: he was interested in adapting her life story to the stage and recommended that Linda would be the actor to have involved because of her improvisational skills. Paul was to act as director in this process.[25] All three participants agreed that Linda would spend a period of time 'shadowing' Maria, learning as much as possible about her life, her community and the woman herself. After this period of time Linda would begin to improvise the scenes of the play by acting out scenarios from Maria's life, all the time attempting to keep as close a representation of Maria's actual self as she could.

The structure of this creative process offers up the three main issues that I want to explore in this chapter. Firstly although it is not explicitly mentioned, at

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25 The director's role, as it is outlined in Linda and Maria's narrative, seems to be quite contrary to that of a director in a mainstream production. After establishing the contact between the two women Paul was not involved in the research phases of the project. He reentered the picture as the process went into improvisational 'writing'. At this point it appears that his role involved suggesting potential scene material and guiding the actors through the improvisations. In addition there is reference to his structuring of the scenes, as they began to solidify, into the final 'script'. A longer and more specific description of Paul's role in this kind of a process can be found in Filewod's Chapter 2: "Documentary and Collective Creation: *The Farm Show*. 24 - 49.
It is interesting to note in this dialogue between the two women the way in which Paul gradually fades from the picture. Although this is entirely realistic, as the primary relationship is between Linda and Maria, it is ironically similar to a larger feminist dynamic of men ending up in the background as difference gets configured between women as opposed to between genders!

the beginning of the process there is evidence that all three were aware of the history of colonisation that stood between their various communities. There is a pattern of colonisation to the way that the primary relationship develops. It is evident in the assumptions that each woman had in place about the other, then in the ways in which these were broken down, or failed to be broken down.[26] These relationships serve as an excellent model of a colonial process taking place on a microcosmic, personal level, illustrating as they do, how a colonial history impacts interpersonal dynamics.[27] Secondly I will be discussing the potential for cultural appropriation within the structure of Linda 'shadowing' Maria. Both culturally and personally this process set up an inevitable 'robbing' of Maria that became a contentious issue being further contextualised and complicated by the history of colonisation. The third point that I want to develop in this chapter is the assumption that Linda would, or could, represent Maria on stage. As the first example of representing the 'other', which is a common thread throughout the following chapters, this case is perhaps the most extreme because it involved Linda having to 'brown up' every night to perform. The use of make-up moves this representation onto an unavoidable level of consciousness. Even before the performances she attended community events with the intention of 'passing' as aboriginal and in all cases this was done with the consent of Maria. This last point is a good reminder of the passing of a cultural moment, as I don't believe that the same choices would have been made today. In each of these three discussions I am interested in continuing to examine the relationship between the events as they unfolded in the early eighties and the reflection on them eight years later.

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26 Throughout this chapter there is consistent reference to the parallels between feminist and colonial theory: or, the ways that colonial theories are performed within feminist discourses. My thinking in this area was greatly forwarded by such theorists as Chandra Mohanty.

27 Although neither Maria nor Linda directly refers to the feminist belief that the personal is political, their relationship is an excellent example of this theory in practice as their interpersonal dynamics so frequently mirror the larger feminist (as well as colonial) dynamics.

Being able to see the way in which this creative process was a minefield of intercultural explosives is, of course, the luxury of hindsight. Not only do we have the events to reflect back on but we are also doing that reflecting from a cultural moment that is more critical, and in some ways more wary, of such a process of cross-cultural representation. It seems dangerous from the start for Paul to suggest that Linda immerse herself in the Native community in order to represent it on stage. Given the unequal power relationships between the Native and white cultures there was great potential for this process to become an exploitative appropriation. (This is a concept and concern that I will develop further, both in this chapter and the conclusion). I think it is important to note, therefore, that this was not only the decade of Documentary theatre but that this was specifically the process of work that Paul was renowned for and the process that Maria expressed an interest in learning.[28] In The Book of Jessica Linda refers to The Farm Show which had been a landmark theatrical production.[29] It had involved a company of actors living in a farming community for an extended period of time, taking on the work of the farmers, involving themselves in all of the community events and eventually improvising a play that included all of those community members in it. The Farm Show had been a huge success, both with the community it represented and with the theatrical community. The theatre community embraced the working process and the chance to see truly Canadian characters on a stage that was itself suffering from the colonial impact of exclusively English productions.

It was this theatrical moment and process that Paul and Linda were working within and that Maria expressed an interest in learning about. From the women's representation of themselves in The Book of Jessica, Maria was not

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28 Again, Filewod's survey of this period of work is informative in its documentation, although as a product of its time (1987), it lacks a more current analysis of the cultural dynamics underlying these projects.

29 Theatre Passe Muraille. The Farm Show. Toronto: The Coach House Press, 1976.

aware of what that process would entail while Linda was "doing research like the good improvisational animal (she) had become".[30] It is easy then to lay the blame at Paul's feet (as the director), for not better preparing everyone for the explosive possibilities that lay ahead of them. This blame seems unfair, though, given that I am observing this process from a time distance. Again, I cannot stress enough the importance of the difference in cultural environment at the beginning of this process. White popular theatre workers were frequently working within Native communities at this point, there was no Native theatre (or actors) to take on this role and it seemed perfectly reasonable that Paul and Linda should transpose their working process onto Maria's community and needs. The disruption of these cultural conditions was happening simultaneously to the disruption of the personal relationships chronicled in The Book of Jessica: as a result no-one could have been expected to realise, or predict, this shift in advance.

One thing that should have been evident, though, was the reality of the relationship between the two women based on the fact that they were representatives of their respective cultures and that the cultural relationship was one based on mistrust and exploitation. Consistently Linda and Maria refer to each other, or describe each other, in terms of the cultural icons that they represent. For Maria, Linda's status came from her involvement in the theatre community:

> Maria — I was totally freaked out by her. She was a star. Not only was she an actress but . . . she was the best improviser in the country[31]

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30 Griffiths and Campbell. 4.
31 Griffiths and Campbell. 19.

But even at this early stage, intimidated as she was by Linda's acting experience and star status, Maria still associated Linda with the icons of white domination of Native people; most obviously religion and the Catholic church:

> Maria She always looked like the Virgin Mary, passive, a blank look in her eyes, smiling, she never stopped smiling, smiled so much I just wanted to smack her and smack her so she'd stop that smiling. . . . She walked around like a missionary, begging for something with one hand - give it to me, tell me about it - just bleeding all of me dry.[32]

For Linda on the other hand, Maria's status came from her activism, the fact that she was known as someone who would speak out and defend her community. Maria was a fighter and a leader:

> Maria Campbell, Metis writer, activist, teacher, catalyst . . . quiet and dignified, almost strangely so. She had the kind of energy that turned me into an enthusiastic cheerleader.[33]

In light of this Linda felt "exposed, small and white".[34] There is obviously a difference in the personalities of these two women, but what is also being addressed in their first impressions of each other are the constructed cultural personalities that they are both expecting to come into contact with. Maria associates Linda with icons of power in a white world. Even though Linda is not a practicing Catholic this is the sensibility that Maria constantly places upon her:

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32 Griffiths and Campbell. 15.
33 Griffiths and Campbell. 17 and 19.
34 Griffiths and Campbell. 13.

a Christian mentality carrying the tainted history that Christianity represents to aboriginal people. And indeed, although Linda is not practicing, she was raised within a Catholic tradition and inevitably carries that sensibility. Maria also refers to Linda in terms of her position of privilege: she was a "star", someone who had the ability to demand attention across the country. In Maria's understanding Linda was someone who had a voice and would be listened to.

Linda's assumptions of Maria are equally based in a cultural expectation. Even in the first impression quoted above there is a hint of the exoticisation that Linda develops for Maria, so that she is not just "quiet and dignified" but "strangely so". Maria makes Linda feel small and inadequate but also over-enthusiastic and too full of energy. This contradiction seems to come from the tension between Linda expecting Maria to be an exotic, wise Native woman and so for herself to appear gauche in comparison. There are lots of references to age or age metaphors in this early section with Linda feeling or appearing young and Maria seeming to have a wisdom of experience. There is the reality of the age difference between them but here these references also seem to represent a colonial relationship where the two forces (colonised and coloniser) are respectively represented by each other, the former as having a sense of age, wisdom, spirituality, and mysticism and the latter as being foolish and inexperienced.[35]

The reality of these cultural differences underlie many of the other differences that are evident between them:

> Eighteen years separated us, as well as race, class, culture, social work, political work, and in its own

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35 Edward Said's Orientalism is seminal in defining this process of placing values of 'wisdom' versus 'ignorance' upon entire cultures and races.
In Sally's Rape Robbie McCauley points to this too. She describes her grandmother telling her as a child that "white people were not genetically evil or anything, they were just dumb, and when they learned something, they would be smarter about us." 226.

> category, what Maria called 'the street' - almost every boundary I knew, and lots I didn't know.[36]

Linda, I think unconsciously, uses in this description many of the identity categories that would become problematic between women in the ensuing decade. She is specifically recognising them in reference to the gap between her and Maria that "widened at times to a gulf that seemed impassable".[37] One of the first difficulties that they faced was finding enough of a bridge across that gulf to support them in the process. Given all of these differences Linda still had to find a way to broach the areas of Maria's life that she would be including in the play. As Linda tells the story of their initial time together it becomes clear that the "gulf" between them represented the differences in their experiences:

> Suddenly I was polite in a way I hadn't been in years. I couldn't find the way to say, 'So how did you start hooking?', or 'What's it like to be strung out on smack?'. . . . Maria's experiences were a little different from mine. Like, totally different.[38]

It is curious here that Linda is specifically identifying the difference between their experiences as the reason that she was unable to ask about Maria's life. Underlying this is a sense that we are safest when we are talking to people who have similar experiences to ourselves. The differences in their life could have been the *reason* for them to talk but instead they are something to be avoided. Again, I think that Linda gives some insight into the reasons for her fear of approaching these areas of Maria's life when she says:

> Underneath the questions and answers , I knew there was a pressure cooker of a woman beside me. She

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36 Griffiths and Campbell. 21.
37 Griffiths and Campbell. 21.
38 Griffiths and Campbell. 24.

> might get mad. She might stop the car and make me get out. She might turn on me in some way if I did the wrong thing, said the wrong thing.[39]

Linda is identifying the fear of saying something wrong, of misinterpreting Maria's experience: underlying this is the fear of her own privilege. She is afraid that Maria would attack her on the grounds of having a middle class, white, Canadian life that had not included the kinds of experiences that Maria had overcome. In addition there is a fear that as a white woman in a country where white people have colonised Native people she would somehow be held responsible for those experiences. Linda's comments seem to represent a general fear that women have of working together across difference. What is it that Linda fears saying that could be 'wrong'? It could only be something that is inappropriate or insensitive in the light of her position of privilege relative to Maria. This is a fear that seems to stand in the way of many opportunities to work across boundaries or divisions amongst women. It is the fear of revealing yourself as privileged; therefore not understanding the oppression of other women. Of course for women in Maria's position the problem lies more in always being the one who has to educate the privileged woman. This point is raised in Sally's Rape when Robbie McCauley refers to a college major who was unaware of the historical rape of slave women by their slave masters. Robbie is frustrated that someone who has all the privilege to enable her to be at an Ivy League school can also be ignorant of that kind of cultural abuse.[40] I think that Linda fears a similar frustration, or anger, from Maria towards her own ignorance and naiveté.

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39 Griffiths and Campbell. 4.
40 McCauley. 225.

Maria mentions many times in the book the fact that she is engaged in this process in a second language. This does not mean that she doesn't speak English fluently: more that English is *culturally* a second language.[41] Her objection is on the basis of using the language of her 'oppressor'. This is clear in one of her comments:

> Maria That's why I hate working with the English language, and why I have a hard time working with white people, because everything means something else.[42]

The key here is that working with the English language is synonymous to working with white people. The assumption that such a project as this will be carried out in English is representative of the power imbalance between the two parties involved. Maria is expected here to describe her moments of oppression to the oppressor, using the oppressor's language. Her comment that "everything means something else" is both literal and an explanation of the way that the historical relationship between the Native and white cultures is perpetuated through the language. In this way, using the English language, she can never enter into the process on an equal level, no matter how proficient her English is.

The fear of saying something wrong for Linda, and the frustration of working in English for Maria, are clearly barriers right from the start of this process. They are indications of the importance of language in this kind of work: Our choice of language (both in terms of choosing English over other languages

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41 Janice Acoose speaks to this cultural second language in the introduction to Iskwewak: Kah' Ki Yaw Ni Wahkomakanak. She refers to working in English as "painful", even though she "cannot participate in [her] Indigenous languages with active competence". 12.
Thanks to Debra Shogun for furthering this point with reference to Spivak's article, "Can the Subaltern Speak?". Here Spivak is extending this concept of a 'cultural second language' by examining the ways in which larger structures, as well as word choice, perpetuate the position of the dominant language. In reference to Jessica this can be seen to be played out in the telling of a Metis story through a traditional, European theatrical structure.

42 Griffiths and Campbell. 17.

and our choice of language on the level of word choices) is loaded with the cultural dynamics that contextualise relationships and potentially jeopardise them. A tension is present then between having to use *a* language in order to communicate and yet the choice being something that potentially shuts down the communication. Dialogue is a highly visible and vital process in all three of the chapters (whether dialogue between the creators as in this case or between the performers and audience as in the other two) and I think that the tensions that are pointed to here are some of the reasons that the dialogue becomes such an important focus: exactly because it is the most difficult to achieve.

One of the ways that Maria evades the language issue is by choosing to *show* Linda elements of her culture instead of *telling* her about them. She takes Linda into her community, introduces her to her teacher, Hannah, and even invites her to attend sacred ceremonies. Linda is completely enamored with what she is shown:

> Linda I saw your culture, and it was like a treasure chest opening up, and the maniac romantic in me just dived in up to my elbows. These images and stories were fresh, still alive, people still believed in them. They had real power.[43]

The danger here is that Linda begins to use the information she is given not just as research for the play but as a romanticisation of the Native culture. Maria invites her to witness in the hope that she will better understand the role that she is about to create and perform. But instead Linda seems to have a desire to disassociate from being white, wanting to embrace the Native culture instead.

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43 Griffiths and Campbell. 85.

There are many things at work here, one of which is the fear that I referred to earlier of being exposed as the oppressor, or the carrier of all the privilege. This fear seems to be part of Linda's desire to associate more with the Native community than to acknowledge her role in the white community. Secondly, Linda finds a way of erasing 'white' as a cultural identification so that she is, in her own mind, culture*less* when she enters the Native community. Therefore she sees a richness in front of her that she feels herself to be missing. This erasure comes from the dominance of whiteness having such a historical pervasiveness that it begins to become the invisible norm to which everything else is an 'other'.[44] I am not suggesting that Linda single-handedly erases white culture here, she is merely carrying into this experience a cultural reality: that 'white' has become an invisible cultural category through its dominance. In the early stages of the process Linda dismisses white culture as being "from a shopping mall", seeming to suggest that whiteness is a *non*-culture.[45] As she feels herself to identify more and more with the Native culture she disassociates from her white identity: "I saw the other white people and I didn't want to be one of them".[46] One result of this process of disassociation seems to be that Linda steps back far enough from her whiteness (by immersing herself in the Native community) that she begins to understand the cultural dynamic at play between herself and Maria. At the same time that she is claiming to not want to be like the other white people she admits,

> Guilt hit me like a club. Why had these people had so much trouble? Because of me. Because of the oppressive behavior of my people. Who were 'my people'?[47]

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44 See Frankenberg for further elaboration on the erasure of whiteness as a cultural identity.
45 Griffiths and Campbell. 5.
46 Griffiths and Campbell. 22.
47 Griffiths and Campbell. 22.

Obviously there is an identification with the reality of the colonial relationship and Linda is beginning to come to a realisation of her own whiteness. This is not an unproblematic process: firstly because she had to appropriate a Native sensibility to arrive at her own and secondly because, in reference to the above quotation, I would have to ask how constructive an emotion guilt is. But, somehow throughout this process and the time spent with Maria, Linda moves from denying her cultural association to admitting:

> I was white, really white. Whether white is a sensibility or a colour. Sometimes it can be a place.[48]

This last realisation is where Linda starts the book and the narrative. It is the place from which she looks back on the process that they were involved in and I think that it is not only the process but the larger cultural shifts in the interim between the process and the reflection that have enabled her to arrive at this place. What she is reflecting on is her appropriation of the Native culture - the ways in which the erasure of her whiteness created a void that she attempted to fill with the Native culture that she had surrounded herself with:

> I wanted to feel like them so badly, believe like them, understand like them.

However, in the process she was essentialising the Native experience. The "them" in the above quotation designates all Native people in Linda's belief that being Native meant having the kind of community that she saw around Maria. Even though she was there to research Maria's life story, in her romanticism of the life Maria had found for herself Linda was forgetting the life that Maria had lived previously which was not in the least bit glamorous or romantic.[49]

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48 Griffiths and Campbell. 5.

49 Of course it is also dangerous to reduce the Native experience to the Maria/Jessica binarism: either the spiritual leader or the street walker. These stereotypical depictions of native women are expanded upon by Janice Acoose in Iskwewak: Kah' Ki Yaw Ni Wahkomakanak.

The other contradiction here is that despite all of the respect and veneration that Linda seems to have for the Native community she ends up betraying it, and Maria, in the most obvious way: by including in the book information about the sacred ceremony that she was invited into. This moment in the narrative/discussion is loaded with both the intercultural dynamics as well as the realities of the time difference between the event and the reflection. Initially, as the reader, I was drawn into what sounds like an exciting, romantic ceremony and then was caught in my own exoticisation of it by Maria as she stops Linda:

> In the middle of the room, spread out on a large cloth were objects of power, bundles of cloth, pieces of animal skin, pelts, teeth, wings, things that were there, and things that I imagined. There were drums and rattles, stones too, something in the very centre, and long . . .
>
> Maria I don't believe you're doing this! We went through all this at the rehearsals. I talked about why you weren't supposed to do this, turn it into journalism. You told Hannah you wouldn't write it, you wouldn't talk about what happened in there. I believed you.[50]

This is the beginning of a long discussion that swings back and forward between Linda exposing more of the ceremony whilst Maria gets angrier at her betrayal. As the reader, I found that I too swung between wanting to know more about what Linda was describing, feeling myself getting swept away in the exoticism of

50 Griffiths and Campbell. 27.

it all, then feeling *myself* to be the target of Maria's anger and agreeing with her right to silence Linda. This is a highly effective piece of the text because, as a white woman reading it, I felt very connected to the tensions within the argument. At the same time though I was very aware that I was reading a discussion that had been edited. It is too easy, at the time of reading, to forget this. It can appear that the argument is happening in front of you with Linda slipping up by beginning to tell the story of the ceremony. Of course this isn't the case; rather she has made an editorial decision to keep both the revelations and the discussion in the book.[51] In this way the final published material mirrors both the original moment of cultural appropriation, when Linda attended the ceremony, and the original disagreement between Linda and Maria. Focus is sharply pulled onto the tensions implicit within this argument by its inclusion in the book.

Any of the discussion about cultural appropriation within this project is further complicated by the personal nature of the 'subject' that Linda was researching: Maria. The feeling of being robbed, of having something stolen, is a two-layered one for Maria: it operates both on the cultural level, as with the above example, as well as on the personal level as Linda takes the story of Maria's life then improvises it back to her. There is an equal potential for an invasive and unbalanced dynamic on this second, personal level as there is on the first, cultural one, although I also do not feel that they are easily separated. Maria seems to be very aware of the tension and confusion that Linda is feeling throughout this process. At one point she says:

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51 I cite Linda as the editor here because it was her role to edit the transcripts prior to publication. What is not clear from the discussion (or from the publication information) is what voice Marie had in the final draft and particularly the publication of this section of dialogue. There is an interesting and complex contradiction present if she did in fact agree to its publication.
The irony of the circumstances surrounding the publication of this book are such that, despite every effort to include Maria's contributions, it is still Linda, the white, dominant voice, that ultimately ends up as the editorial voice. The circumstances seem to further parallel the microcosmic representation of the macrocosmic power imbalance.

Maria I'd want to take her, and hold her, and rock her, and sing songs to her, I wanted to heal her. Every time I'd feel like that, she'd jump up on the stage and she'd play it all back, and I'd stand there feeling like she'd stolen my thoughts. She'd just take it all.[52]

I referred earlier to the way that the relationship between Linda and Maria gets configured through age. Here Maria is infantalising Linda by turning her into a hurting child. Although Maria feels as though Linda slaps her in the face here, there are many instances of Linda turning to Maria in an attempt to understand the pain that both of them are feeling. I mentioned above that the appropriation between these two women happens on a cultural and a personal level: if on the cultural level Linda appropriates Maria's ceremonies and spirituality then on a personal level she attempts to appropriate her pain. For Linda part of the reality of erasing whiteness as her culture is that she then has nowhere to locate the kind of anger and oppression that she feels:

Linda It's amorphous, like air; you go to hit it and it gives up, you go to name it and it curls up in a nice ball like a kitten, you yell at it and it cries. . . . You can't find it.[53]

In comparison she sees Maria's pain as "tangible":

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52 Griffiths and Campbell. 15.
53 Griffiths and Campbell. 75.

Linda It was so clear with you, a life filled with racism, with oppression, lived against horrible odds just pressing you down.[54]

Linda sees Maria's situation as more clear cut than her own. She seems to be saying that the enemy is more identifiable when you are oppressed than when you are the oppressor: partly because when you are the oppressor you have to accept that *you* are possibly the enemy. However, this reduction to a binarism of oppressed and oppressor, or enemies, doesn't seem to get at the crux of the dynamic between Maria and Linda here. There is an element again of Linda exoticising the kind of pain that Maria had experienced. Maria recognises and names this:

Maria She wanted to suffer like I had suffered, but how did she know what I'd suffered, or if I'd suffered?[55]

But there is another contradiction implicit in this discussion about suffering. It appears that Linda is looking for some way to equate her own experiences to those of Maria: she is looking for something that carries equal weight. She does this by taking on Maria's own experiences, through the medium of the theatrical process that was being offered to her, quite literally, and somehow this seems to free her of something:

Linda When I started to . . . act you . . . write you . . . whatever it was I did . . . I could act the way I felt, as if somewhere I had been beaten, raped, oppressed. I could

54 Griffiths and Campbell. 75.
55 Griffiths and Campbell. 15

act from the part of me that wasn't a
nice, clean girl.[56]

I think that Linda is asking to be freed of the weight of privilege. Taking on Maria's reality relieves her from being part of the systemic oppression that was responsible for maintaining Maria in a place of disadvantage. Instead she can look at herself as a victim of that system who is powerless to change it. I don't mean this to be a harsh criticism of Linda or of her desires to escape her privilege: in fact I am addressing it because of the ways in which it feels familiar to me. But this feeling that Linda is avoiding addressing her position of privilege does appear to be substantiated by the contradiction that Maria, in her frustration, insists that Linda research her own historical positions of victimisation and oppression but that Linda refuses to do this. Maria knows that in Linda's Celtic ancestry there are countless examples of a disenfranchised culture. In attempting to get Linda to focus on those instead of on the Native culture, she says, "How could you be political without knowing your own stories?".[57] There is an argument here that a tit-for-tat exchange about whose oppression is worse is an unconstructive tangent. That seems to be what Linda means when she says,

Linda Hard to stand up and say, 'Oh, yeah,
well, six hundred years ago in Scotland
my ancestors had a rough time too.'[58]

But I think that Maria is registering a more complex complaint than Linda's response suggests. She is referring to the position of power and privilege that Linda has, pointing out how that power is maintained as long as Linda doesn't have to admit to her own (albeit historical) moments of powerlessness. Maria says:

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56 Griffiths and Campbell. 76.
57 Griffiths and Campbell. 36.
58 Griffiths and Campbell. 7.

Maria It seemed that that could be a meeting place for us.
You could say 'This is what happened to my grandfathers,' and I could say, 'This is what happened to my grandfathers.' That's what made me angry, as if you wanted to believe that my people were the only ones that had suffered this, that my people had been the only ones that were conquered.[59]

The anger appears to come from a frustration at Linda's rhetoric about wanting to understand the suffering yet not looking at where that might be present in her own history. It is an easier option to attempt to place herself inside Maria's experience and find the suffering there: easier because from there Linda is as much the victim, no longer the perpetrator, of the oppression.

From a theatrical point of view Linda was very successful at representing Maria and finding the pain of the life that she was depicting. But this success brings me to the final point of focus for this chapter: the assumption that Linda could or should represent Maria (or any Metis woman) on stage. Again, the political and cultural environment was such that Linda was probably on the crest of the final wave of white actors who would play aboriginal roles.[60] In fact these conditions were changing so fast in the time frame of this project that by the time Linda had closed the successful first run of the show both she and Maria agreed that the next 'Jessica' would have to be a Native or Metis woman. It is sometimes hard within a theatrical context to establish the reasoning behind a

59 Griffiths and Campbell. 35.
60 The cultural shifts mentioned earlier also resulted in the training of more Native actors, removing yet another barrier to aboriginal self-representation.

representation feeling 'wrong'. Harder than elsewhere perhaps because theatre is explicitly about representation: every actor takes on the role and experience of 'others' in performing. So I find it a hard task to identify the reasons that such a representation on Linda's part needs to be examined further, although on the level of gut instinct I know that it does.[61] It is not so much about defending an actor's right to play any role as it is about acknowledging the power structure inherent in the historic and present relationships between the Native and white communities. Given this, and given that Maria's (and Jessica's) story was such as it was because of her position within that power dynamic, having a white woman represent that personal history becomes an ironic reflection, once again, of a dominant structure of control. I referred earlier to the fact that Maria's iconic reading of Linda included her 'star' status. I placed a value of 'voice' upon this: to Maria, Linda had the privilege of being heard through the merit of her theatrical standing. Yet in the opening quotation to this chapter, Linda comments that the Native community realised that a project as large as Jessica would have to have the blessing of the white community. Without inferring conscious agendas here I would suggest that this compromise (Native voices will be heard, but only if represented by white spokespeople) is a representation of the larger cultural dynamic: one of white dominance. This process is further complicated by the fact that even though the original stories were Maria's the final play is a combination of Maria's life story with Linda's improvisations. Jessica the character, as well as Jessica the play, became products of both of the women involved.[62]

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61 This raises the point that I am reflecting on this process from an even further distance than Maria and Linda. My concerns about Linda playing the role of Jessica could be seen as symptomatic of the cultural moment in which I am writing: one which is hypersensitised to certain kinds of cross-cultural transgression.

62 A further irony here is that as a product of white and aboriginal heritage, Jessica takes on the representation that the Metis people have traditionally held in the cultural arena. In reference to her Metis background Maria comments: "We were the children of two peoples who wanted something of each other. And when they started to hate each other, they focused that hate on us, their children" (19). Jessica also takes on that cultural role in the relationship between Maria and Linda.

It is exactly this mixed heritage of Jessica that leaves it open to the complications of who should represent the title role. Jessica herself is Metis (as is Maria). At one point in the discussion Maria argues that Jessica's Metis heritage leaves the option for either a white or Native woman to play her, as either would be an equal half of her heritage. (I feel that this comment is, again, a product of its time. I believe that Maria would possibly make a different decision if casting Jessica today.) The issue of race and body identity becomes central here because Linda had to 'brown-up', applying theatrical make-up to darken her skin, in order to play the role. If Jessica could as authentically be represented by a white or Native woman (or, as a Metis woman, be light skinned) then why was it necessary to have Linda represent her as 'brown'? I raise the issue of body identity because it appears that here race is being solely associated with skin-colour: to be Native is to be brown, to be brown is to be Native. I would argue that if a light-skinned Native woman had played this role, she would not have worn make-up to authenticate her claim to her race. Perhaps this contradiction gets closer to the reasons behind the discomfort that I feel with Linda's representing Jessica's experience on stage. As she needs to represent 'Native', she resorts to skin-colour, hence erasing any other constructions that would enrich an understanding of 'race' as an identity. If a light-skinned Native woman were to play Jessica, skin-colour would be contextualised within the other myriad of realities and identities that constitute race.

The other association of make-up is one that has its origins in the black-face comedy of the United States. Here the specific act of 'blacking-up' was used as a way of essentialising and belittling Black culture.[63] It is hard not to place this historical reference onto Linda's making-up. As well there are plenty of examples of derogatory 'browning-up' that range from Hollywood 'Indians' to

63 The historical tracing of 'black face', and its contemporary manifestations, are the subject of Eric Lott's book, Love and Theft.

children playing 'Cowboys and Indians'. One complication, however, is Maria's complicity in Linda's physical representation. It is her suggestion that Linda 'brown-up' for the community event that she attends. Maria is also party to Linda's backstage preparations, assisting her when the make-up smears. Again, in exploring this fact, I return to the cultural conditions of that time: having the role of Jessica seen by audiences was more important than having her played by a Native woman. Maria had a huge investment in seeing Jessica reach community audiences. At this point she is one of the Native people "practical enough to realise that a venture of this size usually had some white people in it."[64]

I think that Linda herself comes to the realisation by the end of the process that she needs to relinquish control over Jessica because ultimately the play depicts a history and culture that is not hers to represent, despite her part in its creation. It is not an easy realisation for her. Maybe it is in giving up Jessica, as a role, that she finally understands some of what Maria has been trying to impress upon her throughout about cultural appropriation and appropriateness. Maria's parallel process is one of pressing Linda to pass on Jessica to a Native actor. If Linda realises that she has to step back, then Maria realises that she has to step forward. This is not exactly an exchange of power, more a repositioning of awareness: one that is being paralleled simultaneously on the larger cultural level.

It was inevitable in the light of these changes that Linda and Maria's relationship would also enter into new stages. Originally this came in the form of the four-year silence between them after the project, with neither finding the

64 I find it ironic that Tantoo Cardinal, the Native actor who worked alongside Linda, teaching her to chant and watching her make-up, has become very 'successful' since. The cultural movement towards Native visibility has, as all cultural movements do, been swept up into the mainstream that is represented in this case by Hollywood. The presence of Native content on the screen ensures the need for Native actors.

way to begin to reconcile. I think that it is fitting, if only within the scope of this work, that the way back into reconciliation for them was through dialogue, lengthy and painful as it was. At the end of the dialogue, as they appear to reach some kind of a reconciliation, there is the following exchange between them:

> Maria — So can we stick this in with the story of the rehearsals and all that?
>
> Linda — I think this is still the story of the rehearsals, the story of the rehearsals never end . . . [65]

I read this as Linda's acknowledgment of the ongoing dialogue that has been happening for them from the moment they met and through to the publication of this book and beyond. It is a recognition that the creative process, the silence and the reflections were on a continuum of attempting to sort through the cultural realities of their relationship and to contextualise them within the shifting cultural realities around them. But, just in case this all sounds a little too easily wrapped up I want to end with a quotation from Maria that points, not to the ease of this dialogue but exactly the opposite: to the work still involved in finding the language with which to have it. She is actually referring to the colonial forces that invaded Canada and the aboriginal people but, in keeping with the microcosm/macrocosm parallel that is present throughout this book, she could just as easily be talking about her relationship with Linda and the way that they continue forward as women:

> Maria — They stole everything, and now we can't just speak anymore, the old language is almost gone and we don't know the new language well enough to help each

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65 Griffiths and Campbell. 64.

other, heal each other . . . we are just hanging there in the middle.[66]

66 Griffiths and Campbell. 73.

Chapter Two - Woman's Circle[67]

"Hanging there in the middle" is exactly where I felt myself to be as I animated the character of Maureen in "Carol and Maureen", a scene in the Women's Circle repertoire. This scene saw Maureen hung between two different sides of a feminist dilemma. One the one side was an old friend, Carol, who was telling Maureen to leave the support group that Carol attended and Maureen had just started volunteering for. On the other side were the audience members telling Maureen that she needed to stay. It is this attempt to find where privileged women such as Maureen work from that was the premise of Women's Circle.

The variance between Women's Circle and the other two pieces in this study is the nature of difference between the women involved. Both Jessica and Sally's Rape have race as their primary area of difference whereas Women's Circle deals with a group of creators who are homogeneous in many ways. The primary area of difference in this project was the class difference that was often present between the Women's Circle group and the audiences that we contacted. Although this chapter steps away from the discourse of race that was initiated in the previous chapter (and will be continued in the third) it allows for an examination of other, equally important, areas of difference.[68] In addition, the reality of a homogeneous primary group interacting with audiences comprised of 'other' women opens up a comparison between women working within commonalities and women working within difference.

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67 The Women's Circle process was one that involved much critical discussion. Both pre- and post-show analysis was an ongoing part of the relationship between all of the women. involved As a result, many of the ideas that appear here have their genesis in that time. Each of these women were very influential in my understanding of feminism, theatre and the meeting ground between them. I hope that Edith, Sandra, Jan and Jane recognise their influence throughout this chapter. I would like to thank Jan particularly for her comments on this work as it was in progress.

68 In reality the women in our audiences represented many differences, one of which was indeed race. For the purposes of this chapter however, I will be focusing on the implications of the difference in class specifically.

As I mentioned in the introductory chapter, my relationship to the Women's Circle project is very different from my relationship to both of the other projects examined in this study. As a result the resource material that I am drawing from is also very different. Much of it is highly personal. As well as my own reflections and memories of my experiences with the project, I will be drawing on two interviews that took place as my involvement with Women's Circle drew to a close. The first is an extended interview with Jane Heather, who was a member of the Circle at the same time as myself. Jane also had a long history with previous stages of the process. The second interview was conducted by Valerie Shantz, a fellow graduate student, with me as the interviewee.[69] Both of these interviews were used initially as foundations for papers submitted in other areas of my graduate work. In addition to these two unpublished interviews I will be using an article by Wendy Philpott that was published in Canadian Theatre Review. Wendy's article documents the work that was happening in the Circle prior to my involvement.[70]

In using my own memories and reflections of the process I have to admit to their fallibility. Firstly I am writing with a two-year removal from the events that I am chronicling here. I will be using my personal writing and journal-keeping from that time, which offer me a way back into an analysis that was situated closer to the event. I see my distance and the privilege of hindsight as giving me the freedom to continue to complicate that earlier understanding. This process not only allows me to examine the project that was Women's Circle but to trace my own path of ideological development since the ending of that project.

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69 In this case Valerie was interviewing me at my request: asking me questions that I had determined were important. This format came out of my need to have a second voice involved in the monologue that I had been developing in critiquing this project: in this way I hoped to turn it into a dialogue. Valerie was both aware of the project and aware of the issues that I was exploring. I mention this only to qualify that many of the questions that Valerie raised in this interview were questions that I was already formulating and specifically asking her to explore with me; they were not always representative of her own critique of the project. She was invaluable to my deciphering of the theory and analysis that took place then and is continued in this chapter.

70 "Women's Circle: Women's Theatre."

I had hoped to include with this work the scripts of the scenes to which I will be referring. However due to the somewhat unpredictable nature of collectively written work this has proved to be impossible. The process of writing employed by the Women's Circle was one that consisted of many people contributing to the performed version of a scene. The scenes started as ideas that the performers began to improvise around. Once there was some kind of consistent form this would be taken to a 'test' audience that would hopefully consist of women whose issues were being represented by the characters in the scene. In this way the audience could comment on the authenticity of these characters, their actions and their language.[71] Feedback and suggestions would be taken from these audiences and the script would be rewritten accordingly. Due to the longevity of the process (which necessitated a changing personnel in the Circle) each time a script was revisited it would be adjusted according to the woman playing the role and updated to include any political or other relevant information that had changed in the interim since it was last performed. For some periods during this extended process there was a specified writer involved who took responsibility for the shaping of scenes, but mostly these were products that evolved out of the collective voice of all of the participants. It is impossible to credit any individual or particular group with the writing of any of the scenes. However the inability to name a 'writer' can manifest in a problematic ownership of the material. As is the case with much collectively written theatre (and as was certainly the case with Jessica), ownership of the material remains a complex, even a potentially volatile, issue. Whilst the issue of

71 The issue of representing 'other' women is one that I will go on to develop within this chapter. What I will not be developing, but wish to acknowledge, is the implied legitimisation of this representation by having community groups authenticate these scenes. This point is parallel to Maria's legitimising of Linda's Native representation in Jessica and some of the issues are discussed in Chapter One. In addition to that discussion the Women's Circle process raises questions about creating an essential voice (or native informant) for these community groups. The tension here (as with Jessica) is between continuing with these representations, acknowledging that they are problematic, or not hearing these women's voices on stage. Women's Circle obviously chose to perform these women, but it was not without an awareness of these problems.

ownership can largely be avoided in the performance of these scripts, publication of them is entirely another matter. In quoting from these scripts I would like to credit as their creators all of the women who were involved in all of the stages of Women's Circle, those who were hired and recognised as writer/performers as well as those who observed and offered suggestions. I also acknowledge that the evolution of these scripts will continue with every incarnation of the Women's Circle and every new performer who inhabits these characters.[72]

Given the large number of women who have been involved in Women's Circle it is important to identify the women who comprised the group of writer/performers during the time that I spent with the group. They were Jane Heather, mentioned above, Sandra Nicholls, Edith Mitchell and myself and the project initiator and director, Jan Selman. This is the immediate group of women that I will be referring to as 'Women's Circle' during this chapter, and so any descriptions of the Circle that follow are very specific to these five women. They are not intended to relate to any other period of the project's history. There are many women who, at some point, have been members of Women's Circle who would not recognise themselves in the following pages.[73] Again, I am interested in the experience that I had as a member of this group at a very specific time, not in finding a quintessential definition of the group.

This group had a very definite homogeneity to it. In contrast to the women who were the key players in Jessica this group of women were united around a knowledge of their similarities, including a recognition of the privileges they led to. This in turn evolved into questioning what Jane voices in the interview as " . . . the relationship between women of different classes. Is it

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72 The women involved with other stages of Women's Circle, all of whom contributed to the writing of the scenes, were: Patricia Darbasie, Patricia Drake, Padma Viswanathan and Shirley Barrie. The two researchers involved in the project were Lise Ann Johnson and Wendy Philpott.

73 For example, in talking about the homogeneity of the group at this stage, I acknowledge that there were women of colour involved in other stages of this project.

possible to have that relationship and what is the nature of 'help'? And what does a feminist *do*?". Although Jane is referring here to questions being asked at the very inception of the project, these questions were still pertinent at the beginning of the phase that saw me enter the circle. They were pertinent because at that time they were being asked by a group of white, heterosexual, well-educated and for the most part middle-class women who identified as feminists, yet were very aware of their mainstream positioning within that movement. We were also very aware of the cultural movement in feminism that I chart in the introductory chapter. We found ourselves located in the centre of that trend: we were observing the splintering of women's groups into very specialised, even ghettoised, cultures. Along with recognising this fragmentation came a desire to see women reenter the same arena to begin to address these differences, not to find resolution to them *per se* but at least to initiate a dialogue. Being that we were, and are, all theatre artists the arena we chose to work within, the location from which we hoped to address some of the questions posed by Jane, was theatre.

Inherent in this desire to find the action of feminism was a vague sense of 'other' women. If we were the women that North American feminism legitimised as 'woman' then who and where were the women that were excluded from that movement? Women's Circle has always been a project that is interested in bringing women together across lines of difference, then once there to initiate and dialogue allowing it to be the action of recognising that difference. One of the reasons that I was enticed to use this project and this personal experience within this study is the reality of bumping theory up against what I experienced to be the practice of crossing lines of identity between women - the everyday performance of this theory. Within a theoretical context I can question the usefulness of a construct such as 'other' and critique the binarism of 'us' and

'them' that it establishes. In my position as administrator for Women's Circle I had to identify and seek out these 'other' women by following the most stereotyped leads, such as looking for organisations that served women in poverty. It was here that we found the 'other' women.

This seeking out of 'other' women came from a genuine desire to see the divisions within feminism addressed. This doesn't mean that these divisions have to be fused shut but that an acknowledgment of them is important. Yet, there is always the danger, and the fear, that the connections between groups of women, one of whom can be identified as privileged, will be seen as yet another insistence by such women on the concept of 'sisterhood' and a denial of the strength in different identities. Who makes the first move in this situation and if no first move is made then do isolated groups of women continue to stay isolated from each other with feminism becoming a historical movement whose time has passed? I do not mean to suggest that women remaining cohesive in small identity groups is a negative place to be, but if feminism is defined as a movement against patriarchy then it becomes a more difficult movement to envision when the primary area of difference is that being articulated between and within groups of women and not between genders. I think it was with these dilemmas in mind that Women's Circle began to contact the potential audiences of women's groups.

In the interview with Valerie Shantz she questions this stage of the process, placing it within a paradigm of 'invitation' that sees the women involved in Women's Circle as being in positions that enable them to 'reach out'. She claims that our privilege of identifying the audiences that we would perform to left us too open to the perpetuation of a feminist mainstream representation that never really challenged our own, or ultimately our audiences' place within it. At the time I was quick to agree with her analysis, and was very critical

myself of what I perceived to be the lack of conscious theorising of these very issues within the group. In retrospect, and with more humility, I am able to see that all of the women in Women's Circle were very aware of these issues. As I will continue to explore in this chapter, even if the problems were not being verbally addressed then they were being addressed through the theatre being created. After all, the theatre was the main arena that had been chosen as the location of theory in this particular project, so it makes sense to find the theorising within the theatricality.

The theatrical location leads me to the scene that will stand as the focus of this chapter, 'Carol and Maureen'. It is a scene that I think addresses some of Valerie's concerns and is a great example of the location of theory within the theatrical performance and participational audience relationship that was the stamp of Women's Circle.[74] The two characters are introduced through a choral piece that briefly reviews their history together. They were best friends in high school:

Chorus:	Back bone of the volleyball team
Voice 1:	Demon serve
Voice 2:	Killer spike
Carol:	I'd do the biology homework
Maureen:	And I'd do the math
Chorus:	And sometimes . . .
C and M:	We'd skip and go to the Capilano.[75]

However, when they hit grade twelve Carol gets pregnant, and drops out of school to have her son, Jason. The next few years for her are consumed by the

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74 The history of this scene is also important, especially given its content. It was developed in a series of workshops with a community group, Candora. This group included, at the time, both the poor women it was there to serve and more privileged women who were working within the organisation as trainers and organisers. This combination of women, the ways that they worked together and the issues that their differences raised, were foundational to the writing of "Carol and Maureen".

75 "Women's Circle Script." 17. All page references for quotations from the "Women's Circle Script" relate to the unpublished, final working version.

welfare bureaucracy of low-income single motherhood. Initially living with her mother she then moves out on her own attempting to support herself and her baby. Carol and Maureen completely lose touch.

Meanwhile, Maureen finishes high school but deals with the divorce of her parents. She continues on to university, still living at home and coping with her mother's struggle whilst attempting to redefine her own relationship with her father. At university she enrolls in Political Science, takes some Women's Studies classes and is formally introduced to feminism:

Carol:	(AN IMAGE. WALKING A CRYING JASON.)
Chorus:	(CRYING NOISES)
Voice 1:	Doors closing
Voice 2:	(ECHO) Doors closing
Maureen:	(IMAGE. ABSORBED IN A BOOK THAT EXCITES HER)
Voice 1:	By considering these questions we hope to deepen our understanding.
Chorus:	Windows opening
Voice 1:	(ECHO) Windows opening.[76]

In this way the conditions that result in these two young women leading very different lives is telescoped into a brief introduction. They enter the scene as typical examples of women facing the gulf of the differences in their lives, yet there is the connection of their previous friendship.

Carol finds some support for her situation through a mothers' group that she is initially very resistant to attending. Once there however she realises that the other women come from very similar experiences. To her own surprise she is

76 "Women's Circle Script." 18.

able to find a trust and support there. At the same time Maureen is inspired by a visiting speaker in her Women's Studies class who talks about working with women's groups in the community. Following up on this Maureen decides to volunteer some time at a local woman's group. Unknowingly she walks into Carol's mothers' group where the two of them encounter each other again for the first time in three years.

Up until this point in the theatrical presentation the narrative history has been told through choral voices and images. The scene 'proper' starts with the end of the group meeting leading into the first opportunity that the two characters have had to speak privately as they clean up the room. Carol's resentment at Maureen's presence is obvious and soon blows up:

Maureen:	What's wrong Carol?
Carol:	What are you doing here, Maureen?
Maureen:	I'm volunteering. I met Loretta when she came to speak to our Women's Studies class and/ she said . . .
Carol:	/So are you going to grow up to be a social worker or what?[77]

Carol's anger at Maureen intensifies as Maureen explains that she is just trying to "help make things change". Partly Carol's anger is fueled by the personal history between them. She recalls Maureen's absence when she most needed both her friendship and her support after Jason was born. Partly it is her resentment at Maureen's invasion of the delicate trust that Carol was building up for herself in this particular support group. Finally, there is her accusation that Maureen has no idea about the reasons that these women attend the group: that it is all too easy for her to try to find ways to equate their experiences to her own:

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77 "Women's Circle Script." 20.

Carol: God you pissed me off this morning.

Maureen: Carol! What did I say?

Carol: "I know just what it's like with kids".

Maureen: I did not say that. I said that baby-sitting Tracy could be pretty tiring sometimes.

Carol: Well you don't know what these women are going through. You don't know anything. You don't know what it's like when your kid has an ear infection and he cries and he cries and he cries and you put your fist through a wall so you won't hit him.

Maureen: No, I don't know what that's like.

Carol: Then what gives you the fucking right to come in here and tell us . . .

Maureen: I am not trying to tell you anything. But I want things to change.

Carol: (SNEERS).[78]

Carol leaves the scene at this point with her parting shot to Maureen, "Ooo! Little Miss Bountiful helping the handicapped"[79]. She leaves Maureen on stage alone at which point the scene becomes participational as Maureen engages the audience in discussion around what just happened between the two women. This participation happens in character with Maureen usually starting from the anger and hurt that she carries out of the fight with Carol. As the actor performing Maureen I know that the animations I facilitated were propelled by

78 "Women's Circle Script." 21.
79 "Women's Circle Script." 21.

Maureen's frustrated decision to just give up, disappearing back into her 'cozy' little university life. The discussions began with me asking the audience if that was the only thing left for me (as Maureen) to do.

There are several things that I want to explore through the medium of this scene: how Maureen's dilemma with Carol relates to the position of the Women's Circle group; the general direction of the audience participations; and the one performance for an audience of teenage mothers. As I mentioned previously the women involved in Women's Circle were struggling to find ways that they, as privileged women, could find connections to women whose experience is different from their own: especially those from disenfranchised groups. We were asking the question that Jane points to: what is the nature of the relationship between women of different classes? It is this very question that Maureen is facing at the end of the argument with Carol. At the beginning of this scene Maureen is definitely more naive than the women who created her. She is blind to the potential disruption that her decision to volunteer at the mothers' group could cause. At the end of the scene, heading into the audience participation, she is more aware of the complexities of the situation, or to be more exact, she is aware that her decision is problematic, so she is ready to ask the questions that will lead to her understanding the complexities. In this way she is representing the same position as that in which the women of Women's Circle found themselves to be. She is asking the same questions that they were asking of themselves. Maureen's establishment of a dialogue with the audience around these issues then also represented the dialogue that the Women's Circle was hoping to enter into.

The entire process of establishing contact with a community group, taking the performances to their meeting place, performing Maureen, entering into the participation, and socialising with the audience members after the 'performance'

displays the possibilities of theory being performed on all levels of the process. This experience was something that changed, however, depending on the audience watching the piece. It may seem strange to be able to generalise about the make-up of an audience to the extent that I am about to do but there are ways in which it was quite easy to do with the Women's Circle's audiences. Due to a desire to see the dialogue that was established at performances continue after we had left, we had deliberately targeted audiences that were already established in some form of group that met regularly around some specific issue or identity. In this way not only was it easier for us to access groups of women who would be more comfortable with the participational nature of the piece (due to the levels of trust already present within the group) but there would usually be a predefined format within which discussion and continued questioning could be addressed even after the performers were gone. One of the accusations of irresponsibility frequently leveled at popular theatre projects concerns the follow-up once the actors have packed up the show and moved on. All too often an audience is left with no support after a volatile issue has been raised.[80] By performing to groups that were already established Women's Circle hoped to avoid this concern. We also attempted to ensure some longevity to the dialogue by merit of the fact that the audience group would continue to meet in a format that encouraged discussion.

The preexisting community groups that Women's Circle worked with divided pretty much into two groups. There were the groups of professional women and students who identified as feminists. In much the same way as the women involved in Women's Circle, these groups were looking at how their

80 I have attended such sessions where theatrical devices were used to raise issues of topics such as sexual harassment among groups of students. Being a Forum Theatre model, one such piece had students attempt a variety of ways to deflect harassing behaviour. In this instance, and due largely to time restraints, the event was over with no-one having found an adequate 'solution'. I know for my self that I left despairing of my own, or anybody's ability to avoid, or handle, a harassing situation. With no debrief or support structure in place, audience members left this performance alone to deal with the implications of it.

feminism could be put into action. Many of these groups had long histories of proactive feminist work. Others were groups such as a class of Women's Studies students who united on the basis of their academic interests. The second collection of groups consisted of support groups and self-help community groups that had started, often on a grass roots level, from a need in specific communities. They included groups that were support and advocate networks for women in poverty and victims of domestic violence. In this way we had within our different audiences the same make-up as was held within the dynamic of Carol and Maureen's relationship. Unfortunately there was only ever one performance where both of these groups were present together in the audience. This was, I think, a result of the desire to perform to established groups; there were no established, regularly meeting groups that mixed these two kinds of audience members. This reality raises the problem of targeting preexisting community groups; on the one hand there is the infrastructure for follow-up and continued discussion, on the other there is a continued division of women along the very preexisting lines that we were hoping to draw into question. This division creates almost a ghettoising effect that sees very little cross-over between the women from both groups. We were attempting to initiate discussion about Carol and Maureen's dilemma with the audience groups: such discussion would have been facilitated by having representatives of both of these characters in the audience at the same time. Ideally with a less homogeneous audience this dialogue could have expanded from character and audience to audience members engaging with each other. As I mentioned this expansion was only possible with the one heterogeneous audience to which we performed.

I wish to look separately at the performance of theory with the two types of audiences we performed for: those when the experiences of the audience was closer to Maureen and those when it was closer to Carol. Examples of the former

situations were audiences that comprised a firm of feminist lawyers and the Women's Studies class referred to earlier. In these cases the response to Maureen's questions was always strongly suggesting that she should continue to be involving herself in community groups such as the one Carol was attending. This came with the proviso that she needed to be sensitive to her relationship with Carol: either to find a way of reconciling that or, if necessary, to move to another group. But the underlying sense was very strongly that Maureen had a role to play there: that it was important that she not allow her experience at the first meeting to put her off. Initially I was aware of thinking that this response was due to the fact that these women saw themselves very clearly in Maureen. They were unable to reconfigure a previously held understanding of feminism that was based on a model of 'sisterhood': foregrounding the importance of solidarity between women. Therefore, within this model it was more important that Maureen find a way to form equitable relationships with women such as Carol than face the possibility that she had no place within the group.

One of the advantages to Maureen being a younger character than a lot of the audience members she interacted with was that she was in a position to speak to a more recent trend in feminism. In fact as the contact with these audiences continued the focus of the discussion turned away from the direction of "Is there a place for me in this kind of a group?" towards "Whether there is a place for me or not, is this the *best* or the *most useful* place for me to be now?". As a group Women's Circle was hoping that this latter question may better approach the issue of roles for privileged women in feminism without denying the work and roles that these audience members had previously played. We were looking to complicate the notions of 'help' and 'solidarity', and to accept

that women may need to be looking beyond these notions towards a new definition of feminism.[81]

This view of Maureen definitely having a place within Carol's group would have been easier to dismiss as the wishful thinking of mainstream feminists if it hadn't been so resoundingly supported by the audiences that represented women from less privileged positions. It was initially a big surprise to me that the audiences of women who would have identified more closely with Carol's experiences (and who were in fact members of very similar groups to the one represented in the scene), voiced very strongly that Maureen should insist upon remaining with the group. They felt that although it was her responsibility to discover *what* exactly her role there was, there was no doubt that she did indeed have one. They seemed to be suggesting that the dialogue between Carol and Maureen was a crucial one, if Maureen was firstly to understand her position of privilege compared to Carol and secondly to understand where that left her in terms of her action as a feminist. As the animator of Maureen I was expecting to face more hostility. I had imagined Maureen being told to back off and leave these women to their own support group. There was much conversation about the ways in which she needed to allow Carol the time to adjust to her presence and that she could only be there if she was willing to accept that she had much to learn about the situations that the group members were facing, but ultimately the discussion was fairly unanimously favorable to her presence.

Now there are several mitigating circumstances to be pointed out here. Undeniable is the fact that we were a group of privileged women entering into this relationship with community support groups from a position very similar, if more critically aware, to the one from which Maureen was entering Carol's

81 I do not mean to imply here that we were bringing these issues to groups that were unaware of them. Many of the groups that we performed for consisted of women who were deeply engaged in the thinking and discussion around these issues. In presenting the dilemmas theatrically we were hoping to bring a new or different perspective to the analysis.

group. Our connection to Maureen's questions was probably very obvious and the potential need for our audiences to 'be polite' to us, entering into this dialogue on our terms, is something that we cannot prove or measure but something that would almost assuredly be present. In addition each of these audiences had been approached by us (invited by us?).[82] Only after hearing a description of the process and the content of the material had they agreed to hosting the show. In this way we were probably not encountering audiences that were going to be more vocally hostile about the situations that we were presenting and the dialogue that ensued. This acceptance of the group was probably also representative of an expectation as to the nature and direction of the dialogue. I cannot help wondering to what extent we were all playing roles in that situation with the audience playing the role, once they had agreed to host the show, of affirming our decision to be there. If this was so then they were affirming that for us through their affirmation of Maureen's presence in Carol's group.

Given this affirmation there was a certain inevitability to the kind of responses that we would get from any audience. If an audience of women who felt more strongly represented by Carol than Maureen had responded to Maureen by telling her that there was no place for her in groups such as theirs, or that they were not interested in the dialogue that she was wanting to enter into, then they would, by reflection, have been saying the same things to the women in Women's Circle. If Maureen was left looking for where her feminism interacted with other women then we would have been left there too. It is this reality that makes the Women's Circle project such a good example of performing theory and also made it feel like a risky project. There was an investment of personal theory in the characters that were represented on stage

82 I use 'invited' here as it was used by Valerie Shantz in her critical analysis of the way that community groups were sought out to be hosts to the show.

which made the animation/participation part of the performance so immediate. In retrospect I can see that the theory that was being represented within the microcosms of these performances was even more far-reaching than I understood it to be at the time. Then I thought that we were performing characters that stood very close to our own ideological locations and were risking the interaction with audiences that would ensue from our closeness to the characters; now I see that this dynamic was further complicated by the ways in which our approach to the community groups and their acceptances of us can also be theorised.

It is with this in mind that I want to return to my third and final exploration of this scene: the performance for an audience of teenage mothers. I want to look at this scene in some detail because it was the only example of performing to an audience that so closely resembled Carol's experience. Initially however I need to digress slightly to look at the format and decisions behind the participational section of the scene for this performance.

As a piece of Popular Theatre Women's Circle was developing a participatory model that differs from Forum Theatre, which is used as the basis for most other participatory theatre.[83] Forum Theatre is based on the premise of identifying an oppressor and an oppressed person, creating a scene that depicts a moment of oppression, then having audience members make suggestions or replace a character to explore ways of discovering the empowered action within the situation. This model was seen as problematic by the Women's Circle founders. It was one that needed to be reconfigured:

> I have consistently had trouble with how codified [Forum Theatre] seems to be, how rigid and formulaic it seems to be and . . . I wonder if in fact it is a very

83 Forum Theatre originated from the work of Augusto Boal. A detailed description of both the premise and process of this form can be found in Theatre of the Oppressed. In a Canadian context, theatres such as Headlines in B.C. have used a Forum Theatre model to explore community issues such as domestic abuse.

> male model. It is something for which you have to identify the oppressor and the oppressed person. So you do the analysis about who the oppressor is long before you contact the audience. In some circumstances this is very clear and then the work becomes a teaching tool. It's about asking people to practice. When you move into the issues that we are tackling . . . it becomes much less clear who the oppressor is and who the oppressed person is in the scene.[84]

The rigidity and insistence upon the oppression binarism was something that we were attempting to respond to with the Women's Circle model. The main area of this response was the participation. When it is the 'oppressed person' (as identified by the creators of the scene in a Forum Theatre model) that steps out to an audience the dynamic that ensues is one of 'helping'. As a project that was more interested in developing dialogue than solutions we wanted to avoid that dynamic. We also knew that the role of the animator was vital in this. Firstly the scenes were created to complicate the oppression binarism with no clear-cut, one-way dynamic of oppression obvious.[85] Secondly the decision was made that the character who animated the discussion with the audience should be the character closest to the experience of the audience. With the self-reflection this allowed there was more potential for the discussion to revolve around

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84 Interview with Jane Heather.

85 My thanks go to Jan here whose editorial comments helped me to clarify the difference between a conflict model (Forum Theatre) versus a contradiction model (which is what Women's Circle was developing). In the former the participation is often focused around the animator confronting and resisting: in the process of not allowing 'easy' answers this can develop into systems of right and wrongs. In the latter we were attempting to move away from the 'oppressor/oppressed' binarism into a more complicated, contradictory dynamic. This is evident in the "Carol and Maureen" scene specifically. Michael Etherton was instrumental in the earlier stages of this dramaturgical direction.

genuinely exploring relationships between women rather than falling back into a pattern of help and advice.[86]

Having said this I am not entirely sure of why Maureen was usually the animator of this scene. I know that there was a predominance of audiences that Maureen's experience represented so it made sense for her to animate at those performances, but there were also performances where, given this model, it would be Carol who made contact with the audience. Retrospectively it seems as though the problem with establishing this format of Maureen (and the characters of other scenes) talking to audiences most like her was that, despite the self-reflexivity, there was no difference between these women to form the basis of a dialogue. I am not assuming here that audience members are always going to be in exact agreement with each other, or that there is no dialogue to be had among similar women. However, if the focus was to look at *difference* between women then it makes sense that the representation of difference between the character and the audience is going to facilitate the most truthful dialogue. It is for this reason that the performances that seem, by this model, to be a mistake (those when Maureen animated audiences of women who would have been more closely represented by Carol) are in fact the ones where the performance of

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86 The question of who should be the animating character raises somewhat of a contradiction in participational theatre. As I mention here the concern with Forum Theatre, and its derivatives, is that it potentially establishes a system whereby an audience falls into patterns of offering help and sympathy. Responses to this, especially from groups such as Women's Circle, have included an acknowledgment that in an oppressor/oppressed binarism, giving advice always to the 'oppressed' characters suggests that change is only located with them. Alongside a fear of 'blaming the victim' this methodology can be seen to simply perpetuate the sense that the people in power cannot, or will not, change. (It is important to note, however, that this methodology developed from resistance theatre that could not afford to idealise change as something that would potentially be initiated by those in power. The reality of the power structures in South America, where Boal developed this work, necessitated a theatre that focused on the changes that were possible to implement by those who were victims of Fascistic regimes.) One of the commitments that Women's Circle brought to this work was to have an audience look at their *own* behaviour - hence the decision to have the character closest to the audience be the one to animate. This was the case even when the audience was more privileged. This was quite a departure from Forum Theatre. The contradiction this raises however, is that in having the privileged character step out of a scene, animating discussion around the issues she faces, there is a possibility of perpetuating the dominance of such characters. Once again the concerns of more privileged women, even if these concerns revolve around their relationships to 'other' women, are the centre of focus. At this point I think that this contradiction is still an issue to be addressed by Popular Theatre workers. It was something that the Women's Circle members became aware of through our choice to change conventional patterns of participation. It was not resolved for us in the life of this stage of the project: it continues to be a future challenge.

theory is clearest to me. Even in the post-show socialising at these performances, drinking coffee and meeting the women in a more informal, non-performance way, there was more of a presence of theorising around difference. In this situation the on-stage and off-stage realities are pretty close to each other. Talking with these women as Maureen and as Siân were not that different and the same discussions would continue over coffee as were raised in the participation. These felt like moments of truly addressing the differences that represented our experience as women.

However, for the reasons outlined above, at the performance where the audience most closely represented Carol we decided to switch the animating character for this scene. This was the performance at TERRA. TERRA is a high school that was established to serve teenage women who are pregnant or new mothers. The mandate of the school is to enable these students to complete their high school education in a supportive environment whilst including parenting instruction within the curriculum. This audience was as close to Carol's experience as the Women's Studies students were to Maureen's. So the shift was made for Carol to be the character that stepped out of the fight at the end of the scene. Carol would engage the audience in discussion about not wanting Maureen present in her support group. This change obviously shifted the focus, tone and style of the participation but the underlying theme of the intersection of women across difference remained the same.

My expectation of the path of the participation with this audience is reflected in the interview with Valerie. This interview actually happened before the TERRA performance and we were discussing, and agreeing with, the decision to have Carol animate the discussion:

> Siân: . . . we are looking at altering the structure of the scene so that Carol is the

person who comes out and participates with those women.

Valerie: And to me that is so much more clear cut. I don't know why. . . . It would be very interesting, in fact it would be horrifying, as Maureen to go out there and say, "What do you think?" because they would tell you.

Siân: They would say "What's your fucking problem?".

Valerie: "Stop slumming and give her some money - that's what she needs."

Embarrassing as it is to review these expectations, they reveal a certain fear about the response that this audience might have given to Maureen. I can't deny the relief I felt at knowing that I was not going to be the person animating discussion with this audience! The response that we actually received was all the more surprising to me because of these expectations. The women at TERRA were quite outraged by Carol's treatment of Maureen. They saw her as being selfish and petty, as not appreciating the help and friendship that was being offered. They suggested to her that she "get her shit together", "smarten up", "stop being so immature" and "learn to be grateful for what Maureen is trying to do". Although these are not direct quotations from the audience members they are a close paraphrasing and definitely capture the tone of the participation.[87]

To be honest we were completely amazed. We had expected at least a support of Carol and at worst a lambasting of Maureen. Once again Maureen

87 I want to acknowledge here the danger of treating this audience as a monolithic group. There were some members of the audience who remained silent which can be interpreted as an act of resistance to the general direction of the participation.

was the character who was being most supported, even when Carol was vehemently stating that she would leave the group if Maureen returned. In the immediate debriefing of this session I remember us wondering whether this was an attitude that was perpetuated by the school: one that was so insidious that the students themselves were spouting it unthinkingly. This was loosely referred to as the "Christian" mentality.[88] Other than interaction with a few members of staff we had no reason to believe that this attitude was prevalent in the school. Again, with the privilege of hindsight there are other complications that I can see in the presentation of this scene that could have led to the kinds of responses we witnessed in that performance.

I wrote earlier about how similar I was in lots of ways to the character of Maureen; I was indeed a student, if not of Women's Studies at least with a strong feminist ideology. I have had a very similar kind of upbringing and education to the one created for Maureen. More importantly I was at a similar place in terms of being aware of the ways that my privilege carried negative connotations in a feminist discourse. I too was searching for ways to work with my positions of privilege. The actor who played Carol was not as close to Carol's experiences. Sandra is a mother, but is in her early forties and married. Despite all of the solid research and excellent writing of the character of Carol, when Sandra got up on stage it was not her experience that she was representing. I do not draw attention to this as a way of meriting my position over hers. I was not involved in the original creation of Maureen; she existed as a character before I joined the group. It was only due to the way the casting choices fell that I ended up

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88 We were using "Christian" mentality as a short-hand for an attitude that encouraged gratitude, even in the light of patronisation. Hence in this situation, we were wondering whether the students of TERRA were being indoctrinated with a sense of having to accept the 'help' that they received (especially as they were teenage mothers with no where else to go) and be grateful for it without questioning the agendas or systemic implications behind it. As I explain above, we had no reason to believe that this attitude was being perpetuated by the school; we were simply looking for possible reasons for the response to the scene. I acknowledge the implication that we were assigning a false consciousness to these women due to not receiving the response we accepted. Although this may indeed have been our response at the time it has been complicated with further analysis.

performing her (although I am sure that Jan was aware of my similarity to her in the decision to cast me in her role). The reason that I draw attention to this now comes out of my realisations of how authentic the dialogue felt when Maureen was participating with audiences of women in support groups. This is due to two things: firstly the two sides of the dialogue being represented by the character and the audience respectively. Secondly the character being close enough to me that it was almost Siân in discussion with the audience. In the case of Carol at TERRA the audience was seeing a older woman of obvious privilege representing their position. I believe that they entered into the dialogue that they imagined we wanted to hear. Everything about this situation recreated the environment of mainstream feminism and in the face of this I don't think these young women were in any position to challenge what was being offered them. I don't *know* that this would have been any different if Maureen had been the one to animate; perhaps we would have entered into exactly the same dialogue. But I suspect that there would have been a difference as Maureen and this audience would have represented a closer match to the theory that we were theatricalising within the scene. We would have had a privileged, feminist, educated young woman talking to 'real life Carols'.[89]

This leads me to speculate on the possibilities of working on a project such Women's Circle where the characters created are in fact very close representations of the *immediate* experience of the women in the group who were performing and animating them. In this case the theatricalisation would be a further extension of the dialogue and theory involved in the process of creating the work. This kind of a collaborative process would be an ideal situation - to be able to have one of the TERRA students for example play Carol, animating

89 In reality the women who were students of TERRA were in a slightly different position to Carol because they were already supported by the mandate of the school. It took Carol much longer to find that support for herself. I also want to acknowledge my generalisations here. I am using them to clarify the theoretical positions of women such as Carol and Maureen.

discussion with audiences of privileged women. Although this possibility sends tingles up my spine (!) I am also hearing the voice of reason that kicks in with questions about finding someone who had acting experience, or at least would be able to work within the theatrical conventions established by this project, as well as have the facilitation skills to animate an audience etc.[90] I don't know that this would be impossible however. In the light of the TERRA experience I think that the genuine dialogue that we were seeking with this project would have been very present had we been able to imagine this at the time; not only would it have been present on stage and with our audiences, it would also have been very present in the dynamic of the group working together and creating scenes within which these characters interacted.[91] The only other addition to this would be to also work at having more consistently heterogeneous audiences so that the dialogue that spills over from the process onto the stage then continues to be represented in the audience.[92]

I don't want this speculation on the possible other directions of Women's Circle to dismiss the work of this group. I am quite clear about the value of many of these performances and also want to establish that this scene was only one of five scenes that the Women's Circle was performing and animating.[93] It

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90 I am also assuming that this dialogue is important enough to someone like Carol for her to join our group, or create a new group. Not only does the dialogue have to be important enough but the sense of 'our group' would need to be deconstructed so this is no longer a group of privileged women looking for 'a Carol' to come play with them. I am looking towards a combination of women that represent differing experiences in a way that could make a working relationship very fraught but very necessary to acting upon this theory.

91 The reality of the research and earlier writing stages of this project was that often women of very mixed experiences were involved in long-term workshops that developed ideas for the scenes from the very working dynamics of the group. This is exactly the kind of working experience that I am looking towards here. Unfortunately most of this work was completed by the stage of the process that I am connected to. Hence I am musing about the possibility of this working relationship being something that continued further into the process - right through to the point of performance and animation.

92 Again I wish to thank Jan for her additional information here about a previous, 'mixed' audience group. In a earlier phase of the project an audience of mothers was gathered together comprising of both suburban 'stay at home' mothers and mothers from community support groups much like Carol's. In Jan's recollection the privilege of the former group became increasingly obvious through such things as confidence in verbal communication. This resulted in a dominance of the discussion and essentially a 'closing down' of any genuine dialogue. This experience was one of the factors being considered in the decision to perform to autonomous groups, minimising the heterogeneity of the audience members. This decision was made with the awareness of the potential for isolation that I referred to earlier.

93 The other scenes addressed issues as wide ranging as: the disenfranchisement of older women, particularly those re-entering the work force; the ways in which women were bearing the brunt of

was the scene closest to me due both to Maureen's similarities to me and to the fact that I animated these particular audience discussions. Both of these roles led me to find a way of analysing the processes and decisions that were made around this scene in the kind of detail that I have done here. The process of Women's Circle was a conscious and critical one and the analysis present in this chapter is part of the on-going development of this work. It also continues the ever-present desire to see the process find a way to continue to evolve and grow, reflecting the changing theoretical and ideological underpinnings that support it. I continue to be interested in finding a way to work theatrically with women who represent a myriad of differing experiences: putting those very immediate and personal experiences on stage, not as the representation of a character but as the theatricalisation of a personal dialogue and an immediate theory. It is this interest that turns me to the final project and subject of the next chapter, Sally's Rape and the work of Robbie McCauley and Jeannie Hutchins.

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current government cutbacks; professional women juggling work and family; and women's roles in the potentially violent relationships of their friends.

Chapter Three - Sally's Rape[94]

The first page of Esther Kaplan's transcript of Sally's Rape by Robbie McCauley is, not untraditionally, a description of the characters in the play. What is untraditional about this description is firstly that the 'characters' have the same names as the actors, secondly that the audience is included in the list. The "Players" are introduced as follows:

> Robbie: the one who plays the people in her and who tells all she wants to tell. She is an actor who sings and dances. She is black.
>
> Jeannie: the one who plays the roles she is given and who sometimes erupts. She is a dancer who sings and acts. She is white.
>
> Audience: those who are there, who witness and who talk back.[95]

This introduction immediately blurs the lines between actor and character, leading to the expectation that the play will draw heavily on the 'real life' experiences of the actors. Indeed the play is representative of the history, memories and present realities of the two women involved in its creation and performance. Robbie and Jeannie are involved in the process of theatricalising the dialogue of difference that they find themselves engaged in as colleagues and friends. They are using theatre as a location within which to discover a new dialogue between women.

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94 I was introduced to Sally's Rape through Debby Thompson in her Drama 690: "African-American Drama and Critical Theory" class. I am indebted both to her and to the other students in the class for the origins of many of the ideas in this chapter.

95 McCauley. 218.

Some of the novelty of this dialogue, or at least its counter-cultural nature, is contained within the character descriptions quoted above. Implicit in this introduction is a reversal of 'roles', hence a restructuring of power indicated by the specification of who is doing the "telling". Robbie is in control of how this story will be told. Because she "plays the people in her", there is a suggestion that this story is based more strongly on *her* material; there is an ownership implied here. The description also specifies that "she is black". Jeannie, identified as the white woman, is the one who will be playing out the roles written for her (presumably those written for her by Robbie as well as those 'written' for her by a cultural history of race) and no more (except when she "erupts"). This description points to a reversal of the more common, historical race/power structures. The two women are drawing on stories of American history. They are questioning the telling of that history and suggesting alternative (his)stories that place the contemporary race relations in America into a different context - one that cannot ignore the systematic, historical power imbalance between blacks and whites. This reversal is based on a history that has traditionally seen African-Americans have to play out the roles defined ('written') for them by a white, dominant culture. Constructed from a history that is rooted in slavery, these roles have remained enslaved to relationships of power and material wealth with the white culture maintaining African-Americans in relatively powerless positions. By stating that in this instance the black woman will tell "all she wants to tell", whilst the white woman will simply play "the roles she's given", Robbie is highlighting the injustice of the dominant telling of American history by using theatre as an opportunity to reverse it. She is recognising the power of self-definition and the importance of being able to reclaim cultural history in a way that falsifies and demystifies the dominant representation of cultural stories.

Sally's Rape is steeped in an historical and a contemporary (re)telling of cultural realities. Ostensibly based on the story of Robbie's great-great-grandmother, Sally, and her rape at the hands of her slave master, the piece develops into an exploration of contemporary race relations in America. True to a feminist agenda, it examines these larger political issues in a highly personalised way: through the immediate relationship of the two women involved in creating and performing it. As such it is primarily a piece of theatre that is revealing truths about difference between women as well as attempting to find ways of creating new ways of dialoguing around these differences.

Robbie realises that contemporary race relations, and the divisions between women on the basis of race (amongst other things) cannot begin to be addressed before the historical context is aired. The purpose of this is to shed a clearer light onto the relationships that have developed out of those histories and to admit to the fact that acts perpetrated upon our ancestors are carried with us today. This last point is critical to the physical nature of Robbie's theatre. She believes that oppression and pain (physical, mental and emotional) that cannot be openly expressed gets stored on the body: being incorporated into a person's movement and physical carriage.[96] Given then that everybody constructs an identity for themselves based on the images they see around them, as well as the expectations that are reflected back to them, it is very possible that generations of family carry the pains and oppressions of their ancestors. For Robbie this theory manifests itself in the belief that somewhere on her body she carries the knowledge of the rape that Sally endured. This can be taken on both a physical and a metaphoric/symbolic level. Either way Robbie is maintaining that as an

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[96] This concept is also foundational to Boal's work. He uses a series of exercises that are designed to shift a person's body away from a physical structure that is associated with the kind of work that they do. He believes that feelings of disempowerment are stored in the body memory that is connected to habitual postures. In order to conceive mentally of a situation changing, the change has to be felt as possible in the body first.

African-American woman descended from slaves, her identity includes that of a woman who has been raped. On a physical level that refers to the dreams and the "tightness between her thighs"[97] that alerts her to Sally's presence on her body: on a symbolic level it refers to her cultural rape and the racial oppression that is the experience of most African-Americans. It is in this way that I believe Robbie to be referring to the body as a site of struggle and a site of difference. If her body carries this cultural knowledge, then a white woman's body carries the knowledge of being the oppressive race in the history of American slavery. It is the weight of these histories and this knowledge on both of those bodies that must be addressed before the contemporary relationships can be examined.

It is this insistence on the body as a site of struggle that makes the moment of Robbie's nakedness on the auction block so powerful. This is a moment in the play where both characters are representing their historical roles in the auctioning of slaves; Robbie is standing naked on an improvised auction block whilst Jeannie is chanting, with the audience, "Bid 'em in, bid 'em in". In the narrative of the play this is Sally's experience of the slave auction. In the present reality it serves as an opportunity to remind the audience of the horror of this history:

> Robbie: I take off my sack dress. Mistress?
> Come on. This is what they brought us
> here for.
> On the auction block. They put their
> hands all down our bodies
> to sell you, for folks to measure you,
> smeltcha.
>
> . . .

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97 McCauley. 230

Jeannie: That's what they brought us here for.[98]

Yet it also serves as some kind of a cathartic recognition of the roles that everybody played in this history. The stage directions state that as the audience chants with Jeannie and Robbie stands alone and naked on the auction block, "(i)t should be a moment of communion".[99] This communion seems to come from the collective remembering: from owning that memory and using it as a power to move forward, because until it is owned and acknowledged the denial of it can only stand as a barrier to communication between women. Robbie knows the need for this communion. She also believes that the key to it lies on the body. In an almost sacrificial gesture she offers her body in an attempt to acknowledge it as a site of struggle, allowing it to become a site of dialogue:

> Robbie: I wanted to do this - stand naked in public on the auction block. I thought somehow it could help free us from *this. (Refers to her naked body)* Any old socialist knows, one can't be free until all are free.[100]

This gesture is not an uncomplicated one. It feels relatively easy to state that if difference is carried on the body then freedom comes from a freeing of the body. There are two ways that Robbie and Jeannie go on to complicate this notion. The first is the reality that Jeannie's body is not as easily represented in this historical moment: I will return to this point later. I want to focus here on the second complication/contradiction that they raise through the dialogue of the piece: the difference that is carried in language. Just as our bodies and identities are constructed through the realities of our experiences so are our

98 McCauley. 230.
99 McCauley. 230.
100 McCauley. 231.

choices of language -- or more exactly the 'weight' and substance of the words that we choose: the meaning that they carry for different people in similar contexts. Robbie and Jeannie are engaged in the work of discovering new language here and again, in that process of discovery, the old language has to first be exposed in its inadequacies.

In the section titled "Talking About Different Schools and How To Do" Jeannie and Robbie have been discussing their experiences of schools; an important reference to the ways that we 'learn' to take on the identities reflected around us. Jeannie refers to a period of her education where she was encouraged to embrace a very creative and non-rigid form of instruction:

> Jeannie: . . . My teacher had a long red pony tail and a drum under her arm and we'd go running across the room. . . . Some forest . . . some beast . . . some storm . . . you know the whole thing - wild, free, running!
>
> *Robbie runs across the space and back*
>
> Yeah, we were freer than that.[101]

At this point Robbie seems to get lost in her own world triggered by Jeannie's use of the word "free". Robbie has described earlier how most of her education consisted of listening to her grandmother's slavery stories around the kitchen table. She has also expressed her frustration at the fact that she learnt more about the history of America that way than somebody studying history at an Ivy League University.[102] Both of these seem to fuel her reaction to Jeannie's obviously different education as well as to her description of this time as being

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101 McCauley. 234.
102 McCauley. 225.

one of "wild abandon". This use of 'freedom' is in such opposition to Robbie's understanding of that word:

Robbie	Everybody know how on the day freedom come, we followed Uncle Buck up to the massa porch. And Uncle Buck said,
Jeannie:	Massa is we free?
Robbie:	And that white man took out his shotgun, and said "Yeah, nigger, you free" and shot Uncle Buck dead.
Jeannie:	Massa is we free?
Robbie:	Shot Uncle Buck dead.
Jeannie:	Massa is we free?
Robbie:	Say it again.
Jeannie:	Is we free?[103]

Using the word "free" in the context of education reflects for Robbie on her kitchen table education about the freedom of slaves. Yet Jeannie takes on the voice of the slave here asking, "Massa is we free?". I see her representation here being symbolic of her understanding of the difference in the meaning of these words for her versus for Robbie. This is her recognition that there is a huge gulf of experience between their understandings of that word. Her question is also an acknowledgment of Robbie's earlier comment that "no-one is free until all are free". Jeannie is not just taking on the role of the slave voice for the sake of the story telling here. She is also asking if she is free, as a white woman, of the moments of her history that intersect with what Robbie is describing: free of an ancestry that shot slaves rather than give them freedom.

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103 McCauley. 235.

This is the difficulty that using a shared language to describe such different experience leads to. Robbie and Jeannie are very aware of this difficulty though. They are constantly addressing the fact that the words that they use seem to alter in meaning and depth depending on who is using them. Before Robbie and Jeannie go into the above exchange Jeannie claims that:

> Jeannie: . . . this section to me is where everything is clear. The difference in weight. I say the word "free", and what do you think of? A feather, or a butterfly. You say the word "free", it's totally different. It's light . . . substantial, flimsy . . . weighty . . . [104]

She seems to be suggesting that everything that Robbie says carries more weight, is imbued with a deeper sense of pain and meaning; indeed this seems to be played out in the subsequent section about freedom quoted above.

It is at this point that Robbie asks Jeannie to get up onto the auction block and remove *her* dress. This is not an aggressive request. Robbie is asking Jeannie if she can take on a representation of the history that gives such weight to the word "free" for African Americans. Jeannie gets up onto the auction block, (despite complaining that it is too "art") and although she pulls down one strap she ultimately refuses to remove her dress and stand there naked. [105]

This refusal and this moment in general is an analysis of the possibility of representing experience other than your own. Jeannie is declining to represent a slave woman being auctioned because that is not her history, the scars are not carried on her body in the same way. This is an important acknowledgment of the role that white women can, and cannot, play in the recollection of that

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104 McCauley. 234.
105 McCauley. 234.

history. It is also an acknowledgment of where the barriers still stand between women. It defines the lines at which the understanding between them stops. This does not make Jeannie's refusal a negative thing. I see it as a very respectful gesture that comes from both women recognising the limits that their histories place upon them but not allowing those histories to become an absolute block to continuing to dialogue.

In the previous chapter, Women's Circle, I was questioning the effectiveness of Sandra representing Carol's experience as a single mother on welfare. Particularly, it seemed possible that the audience may find this somewhat dishonest. Jeannie's refusal to represent Robbie's historical position is a part of the same continuum. Theatrically this is further complicated because of a tradition of actors representing characters quite distant from their own lives. However, what Jeannie and Robbie so successfully establish in this moment on the auction block is that women have to accept that in some ways the experiences of others are far beyond their comprehension. Representation of those experiences has the potential to become only sympathetic but sympathy is a insufficient emotion here. It is only once this fact has been named and accepted that Jeannie and Robbie can continue on with the work of discovering what their dialogue is given that there will always be unattainable parts of each other's histories and experiences; rather than something to stop the dialogue this becomes a place to dialogue from.

In the continued way that these two performers complicate everything once it has been established they move from this discovery of Jeannie's inability to represent a slave on the auction block straight into "The Language Lesson", where Jeannie represents the slave voice by asking "Massa is we free?". This seems like a contradiction (and I think to some extent that it is) but it is also part

of a process of Robbie pushing Jeannie towards acknowledging her ancestral role in slavery.

There are many intersecting dynamics at play here between the moment of Jeannie's refusal on the auction block and her question, "Is we free?". On the one hand her refusal shows her respect of Robbie's (or African-American) ownership of that history in a way that she cannot represent on stage. If that is not her role in this history then by implication she needs to examine her ancestral role to begin to look at the repercussions of being a descendant of slave owners and traders.[106] The second half of the meaning here though is carried in a comment that Robbie makes in an earlier section of the play:

> Robbie: It angers me that even though your ancestors might have been slaves - because they did have white slaves . . . only made black slavery mandatory for economic reasons, so they could catch us when we ran away - that history has given you the ability to forget your shame about being oppressed by being ignorant, mean or idealistic . . . which makes it dangerous for me.[107]

In light of this comment, Jeannie's refusal also speaks to her inability, even within this relationship, to acknowledge a part of her own history that might have included slavery. Given each of these readings of her refusal, her following question, "Massa, is we free yet?" and her representation of a slave voice can

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106 Interestingly, it is Robbie who is more clearly identified as being a descendent of a slave-owner.
107 McCauley. 228.

correspondingly be read as acknowledging both her desire to be free of the white legacy of slavery and her acceptance of a time of white slavery.

There are echoes in Robbie's comments above of Maria Campbell's insistence that Linda Griffiths examine her own history for moments of oppression by looking at the repercussions of Celtic dominance by the Anglo-Saxons. In both situations there is more than a historical accuracy being sought. These exchanges are about power and the fact that historical events have given one woman (in these situations) the power to ignore her own history of oppression. I think that both Maria and Robbie are reacting to the potential ease with which Linda and Jeannie could find themselves sympathising by involving themselves in a rhetoric of understanding and connection, when in fact that connection is a part of their own history. This power to forget, or to ignore, is what Robbie sees as dangerous because it maintains her in a position of being the only oppressed one in the relationship. Again this is something that Maria alludes to when she feels that Linda is exoticising her pain and suffering.

In the past I have resisted anything that seems to suggest a 'hierarchy of oppression' between women. A frantic claiming of worse and worse examples of oppression becomes highly destructive and ultimately is only successful in maintaining women in a place of rivalry, reaffirming their status as oppressed. However, it is not this kind of dialogue that I see Robbie or Maria engaged in here. Their struggle is more about the need to see the white women in both of these relationships begin to relate from a less powerful position, or at least a position that recognises that sympathy is a limited emotion. I think that it is very relevant that when Jeannie takes on the voice of the slave in asking "Massa is we free yet?" she is specifically addressing the 'master' and could just as easily be asking if women are free of patriarchy. This is a moment of true feminism as the two women involved seem to have reached some point of communion, despite

the differences that have been laid out through out the piece, and now that "Language Lesson" becomes about using that language as women fighting patriarchy, together.

Of course this fight is not an easy one and the differences that have been highlighted as historical do not evaporate when the relationships are brought into a contemporary context. There is a section of the play titled, "In a Rape Crisis Centre" and this is one of the moments that the historical realities begin to intersect with the present. Robbie has just performed the represented rape that Sally went through whilst Jeannie is seeming to represent a present-day rape. They continue to tell their connected but separate stories, with Robbie telling of Sally's life after the rape and Jeannie telling of a rape crisis centre. Specifically she tells of the kinds of comfort that a woman receives there. The ways that these stories are told become representative of the inequalities between the two experiences across a historical and a racial spectrum: Jeannie tells of warm milk, blankets and women being told that they are not to blame whilst Robbie tells of the commonness of the rapes, the fact that there was no-one to go to and the "COLD". They only seem to become aware of each other's stories at the end of this section:

> Robbie: . . . ain't no rape crisis centre on the plantation
>
> Jeannie: Then what do you do about it?[108]

Jeannie's question here seems to be the quintessential question of this piece. It refers to the huge divisions between the experiences of these women. It is not that Robbie has experienced a rape on a plantation but that she carries that history with her. It is the reality of this history, alongside Jeannie's awareness that things would have been very different for her if she was the victim of rape,

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108 McCauley. 233.

that is the starting place for examining differences. Jeannie has no solutions, she only has the question: "What do you do about it?".

This intersection of past and present realities catapults the play into a conscious examination of the contemporary realities of these women. In the section that is titled, "Moment in the Chairs" the two performers sit opposite each other, entering into an honest dialogue about the nature of working together. Their relationship on stage works here as both a safety net and a model for the audience. It is a safety net because of both women's acceptance and willingness to enter into this dialogue; audiences of white women may fear some kind of attack if Jeannie wasn't present and audiences of black women may fear some kind of a dominant absorption if Robbie wasn't present. The fact that both of them seem able to voice their concerns without fear of attack or absorption is what offers the audience the safety to involve themselves at various points. It is this very same dynamic that gives this relationship the sense of being a model. That these two women can face each other and directly name their fears and concerns is an example of where dialogue between women can, and needs to, go.

Again, it is not always as easy as it sounds. Language is still an issue and something that has the potential to be misunderstood. But a more significant hindrance here is the feeling that someone has to "win" in this situation: specifically, that you win by disarming the other person. In the following quotation this manifests itself in Jeannie's fear that Robbie knows something about her that she herself is as yet unaware of:

> Robbie: What upsets me is language. I can't win in your language.
>
> Jeannie: You're going to win anyway. What upsets me is there's an underlying implication that you're going to unmask

me. That you're gonna get underneath something and pull it out. That you can see it and I can't.

Robbie: What do you think it is? I mean it's better if you say it

Jeannie: Some kind of delusion, self-deception.

Robbie: What about? I mean, what's the content of it?

Jeannie: About my idealism. I have some idea of . . . humanism, something that we share more important than our differences. Of greater. . . . Of greater value.[109]

In this improvised dialogue the two women are addressing the dynamics and fears within their relationship, but they also seem to be pointing to a more universal relationship between women. Jeannie's fear that Robbie knows something about her that she herself is unaware of and that Robbie has the power to unmask this reminds me of the relationship between Linda Griffiths and Maria Campbell because there is an exoticisation implicit - that somehow Maria and Robbie are the all-knowing ones, waiting to reveal the white women to themselves. This seems to be a common thread that runs through relationships between women of different races. It is part of the belief that oppression somehow leads to a deeper understanding, a greater wisdom. This manifests itself in a fear for white women of being ignorant, of having the 'other' woman reveal something to them that may be dark and unpleasant (their racism) or simplistic and naive (their idealism). This is what Jeannie fears in her relationship with Robbie. (Ironically in the exchange about freedom (quoted

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[109] McCauley. 228.

above as part of the "Language Lesson") Robbie does indeed seem to be pushing Jeannie towards something that she doesn't know about herself.)[110] What is incredible about this dialogue between them is that they are able to name both the fears and the differences that lie between them whilst acknowledging the necessity of voicing both of these. At this point naming and dialoguing around these differences is not so much a means to an end as the end itself for right now. This is the only place that dialogue between women can be at and it is not there in order to move on to something else as much as to just stay there for a while.

One of the successful things about this piece of theatre is the way that it consistently complicates expected dynamics and binarisms. Implicit in the Jessica dialogue is the sense of Linda's exoticising and fearing Maria: here, with Robbie and Jeannie, as soon as that becomes an issue it is raised and talked about. It is not allowed to lie dormant between them. In the same way they are constantly redefining a binarism of oppressed and oppressor. In the auction block scene initially the familiar dynamic is established with Jeannie taking the 'oppressor' role and Robbie the 'oppressed'. Yet the reality of the ensuing dialogue is such that the idea of any one person being in an oppressor role cannot remain constant. Both Robbie and Jeannie shift, not so much in and out of these roles, but away from them in an attempt to honestly reveal things to each other: just as Jeannie moves in and out of the inability to represent the slave and then taking the voice of the slave immediately after. In the above dialogue Jeannie says that she feels as though Robbie knows something that she herself doesn't know, then Robbie seems to prove her right in this. There is no sense of a fixed relationship between the two women. It is in constant flux and contradiction. Again it is not a relationship of answers and solutions but

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[110] To what extent Jeannie does not know this part of herself is difficult to assess because their relationship is also at times fictionalised for the sake of the narrative of the play. It is possible that Jeannie herself wrote this section into the play and the sense that Robbie is pushing her there is a development of the theory in performance.

questions, trying things, getting things wrong and contradiction. But ultimately it is a relationship about dialogue, including the importance of finding new ways to name old dynamics in the attempt to move past them.

Dialogue is a crucial part of Robbie's theatre. She writes in the introduction:

> Dialogue is an act . . . In *Sally's Rape* it released me physically to write it. From that personal dialogue, on to the dialogue between me and Jeannie Hutchins, on to the dialogue with the audiences, I found that just the nerve, the boldness to speak about the charged issues of race relations can be something right there. It is an act. It is not before or after the act. Saying the words, allowing the dialogue, making dialogue happen is an act, a useful act in the moment.[111]

This insistence on dialogue as an active force is something that I found useful for myself. Robbie is stating quite clearly here that *just* to dialogue can be a very concrete and counter-cultural act. I think that this is borne out in her theatre as well as in her relationship on stage with Jeannie. Robbie herself points to the different levels on which this dialogue takes place: the personal; with Jeannie; and then finally with an audience. It is the final one of those that I wish to turn my attention to now: the dialogue that takes place between the performers and the audience.

At the beginning of this chapter I pointed to the fact that the audience members are named as "players" in this piece of theatre. As such they have been given a specific role by Robbie and that is to "talk back". This role is even more defined for them in the section titled "Confessing About Family and Religion and

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[111] McCauley. 213.

Work in Progress". There is a play on the word "progress" here with it meaning both an incomplete or changing piece and a piece that is about progressing the relationships between women. Robbie points out that in order for there to be progress there needs to be dialogue. She explains that she and Jeannie cannot carry that dialogue alone. In order for the progress to be complete the audience members need to take their roles on too. Robbie divides the audience into three groups that will have specific responses to issues that are raised throughout the play. Group one will agree with everything that is said, group two will be a "bass line" of "Uh huh" or "yeah, yeah", and group three will be the dialogue group, invited to throw in their own opinions. Initially when I read these directions in the script I felt that this kind of audience division and specification of the way that people respond could only lead to a manipulated response that didn't ultimately facilitate any real dialogue. However, in the context of the piece I can see how giving the audience members 'roles' to play is actually a very freeing act: everything that they respond with can be put in the context of a 'character' response hence freeing up the audience members to involve themselves more fully without fear of their individual opinions coming under attack.

Immediately after dividing the audience Robbie states, "Don't worry, I'm in control".[112] Again, I initially read this as a statement of the dialogue between the audience not being a genuine one but something that is manipulated by Robbie. Vicki Patraka's reading of this though I think is closer to the truth. She comments to Robbie that this statement gives the audience a sense of comfort.[113] It reassures them that they will not be attacked for their opinions: that Robbie is not in control of the dialogue as much as in control of her own anger. She is not about to unleash it at the audience. In this way this comment is in keeping with

112 McCauley. 222.
113 Patraka. 30.

Robbie's declaration after the auction block scene that she *wanted* to do this. I see both of these as ways of supporting the safety net that is in place around the audience thus allowing them to fully participate without fear of being put down.

I want to emphasise that this sense of control does not remove a sense of danger from the play. When the audience members are encouraged to join with Jeannie in chanting "Bid 'em in" during the auction block scene there is definitely a sense of danger present, along with the release that I mentioned earlier. This sense of danger is also present in the "Moment in the Chairs" that Robbie and Jeannie share. Controlling the dialogue is not about making it sanitary and safe: it is about finding a place where the anger is managed to the extent that vulnerability and fears can be shared. This is what Robbie and Jeannie are so successful in modeling. They can be, and are, angry with each other, but this anger leads them to a place of dialogue that is only possible because of the level of safety and control. It is this that Robbie is communicating to the audience in her statement, "I'm in control".

Another way that the dialogue between Robbie and Jeannie operates as a model for the dialogue with the audience is that it is based on questions. Just as Robbie questions Jeannie about her fears in the "Moment in the Chairs", she opens the questions up to the audience and allows them to ask questions of her. Although I have not witnessed this process I understand that much of the success of it comes from Robbie's ability to genuinely listen and attend to the questions that come from the audience. Debby Thompson, who was an audience member, comments that this ability to listen is one of the most extraordinary things about Robbie's audience participation. I think that it is also important to note that she is dialoguing with the audience as herself, not through the medium of a character. This takes me back to my comments at the end of the Women's Circle chapter where I was speculating on the genuine feel of Maureen's interaction

with an audience being connected to my proximity to the character. Robbie takes this one step further because she *is* the character and as such the audience is in dialogue more honestly and directly than in Women's Circle.

As with the "Moment in the Chairs" it seems as though there is no agenda that Robbie has with her audience other than to encourage them into dialogue. I know that in the Women's Circle process we used a language that revolved around "taking an audience" somewhere. Often we were disappointed after performances if a participation had not gone in the direction that we wanted, or an audience had seemed to shy away from addressing a particular area. Obviously, I cannot say for certain that Robbie has no such agenda with her audiences but I feel that the *sense* that she doesn't is as important as the reality. If an audience suspects that you are 'after' something particular they will either give you what you want to hear or will deliberately avoid it, depending on the attitude of the audience in general. If there is no sense of anything in particular being drawn out of an audience, other than an invitation to involve themselves in critical and exciting dialogue, then I think they would be more willing to go there. All of this is also within the guidelines of both a 'role' that the audience are playing and a knowledge that Robbie is ultimately in control.

It seems as though most of the issues that get raised between Robbie and Jeannie at some point get passed onto the audience to involve themselves in too. The play is richly layered in this way so that anything that Robbie sees as important in her dialogue and relationship with Jeannie is also important in her relationship to an audience. The best example of this is the very ending of the show. Robbie and Jeannie have spent much of the play historicising the relationships between women of African-American and white ancestry through their relationship. The message has been clear that contemporary relationships

cannot be progressed until this history has been addressed. The epilogue to the show, "Leaving the Audience Talking", is a further example of this belief:

> Robbie: It has to do with talking to people, even if you already know 'em, and especially if you don't, how a lot of people in different cultures greet each other, I know some native American cultures do: "Who are you and who are your people?" And where I come from, African-American folk be like, "Who children you?"
>
> Jeannie: So our idea was that you were going to turn to somebody else and find out something.
>
> Robbie: Which you can do.[114]

This request to talk with people, finding out something about them, even if you already know them, is the initiation of dialogue amongst the audience members. As with Robbie and Jeannie's relationship it starts with discovering a person's history and ancestry. In this way Robbie and Jeannie leave the audience with the gift of their own relationship as a model. They leave the audience with the knowledge that the history of each woman is going to be the first key to understanding the differences. And even if you don't always *understand* those differences then that ancestry is the key at least to beginning to acknowledge that there are differences and that these will be a constant presence in these relationships. The only answer to them is to embrace them and use them as a place from which to begin talking.

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114 McCauley. 237.

Conclusion

At the beginning of this work I quoted Gautam Dasgupta's comment that "(a)rt allows for representation that is conceived in the imagination free of any constraints". Each of the pieces of theatre mentioned throughout this work can be considered as art and each of them wrestles, concretely but imaginatively, with the issue of representation: in Jessica Linda Griffiths is faced with the realisation that, culturally, it is no longer appropriate for her to play the title role; in Woman's Circle I suggest that a representation of Carol may be better served by an actor closer to her experience; and in Sally's Rape Jeannie Hutchins both refuses and then accepts the representation of a slave experience in a complex process of coming to terms with her own privilege and finding the point from which she and Robbie move forward together. In each of these cases it is the woman of more privilege who is, or could be, accused of an act of representation which can be seen as a cultural, as well as sometimes a personal, appropriation. However, I come to each of these pieces of work, and the work that I am currently involved in, primarily as an actor. As a result I am attempting to fit these theories of representation into a philosophy of theatre that relies upon an actor's ability to 'play', 'act out' (or represent?) a person, a character, that is other than herself: the ability to conceive "in the imagination free of any constraints".

Where then do these two realities meet: one that expresses concern for a representation that is based upon appropriation and another that assumes appropriation as the basis of creation? To take the concern of representation to its extreme end is to suggest that artists can only ever create their work out of what they already know to be their own. Leaving aside the problems that then arise in determining ownership, in the case of an actor does this mean that the only roles that we can ever take are those that mirror our own experiences

identically? This is indeed what Robbie and Jeannie do so successfully in Sally's Rape, to the point that the lines between character and actor are so blurred as to be non-existent. However, I would like to suggest that it is the very essence of the actor's craft to be able to breathe life into a character who is as far removed from her own experience as is imaginable. Perhaps we ultimately 'see' more in another's portrait of ourselves than we do in a self-portrait.

The notion of appropriation, then, needs to be complicated beyond the negative connotation that it has carried thus far in this discussion. The reality is that all art is appropriation. As such the craft and skill involved in 'taking' from others is often a highly venerated act. Art is appropriation exactly because the production of it inevitably alters the relationship between artist and subject: something has been given, or taken. Even Maria, whose sensitivity to the potential for cultural exploitation is paramount, impresses upon Linda that art is about "stealing":

> Maria — Real, honest-to-God true art steals from the people. It's a thief. It comes in. It's non-obstructive. You don't feel it. It comes in, and you don't even notice that it's there, and it walks off with all your stuff, but then it gives it back to you and heals you, empowers you, and it's beautiful.[115]

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115 Griffiths and Campbell. 83. Maria's reference to art walking "off with all your stuff" is so similar to Ntozake Shange's 'lady in green character' in for colored girls that it is hard to believe that this was not an influence on her thinking here, especially as Shange is writing about cultural appropriation:
"somebody almost walked off wid alla my stuff
not my poems or a dance i gave up in the street
but somebody almost walked off wid alla my stuff
like a kleptomaniac workin hard & forgetting while stealin
this is mine/this aint yr stuff
. . . /i want my stuff back/
my rhythms & my voice/ . . .
stealin my shit from me/dont make it yrs/makes it stolen (Shange 49).

Even in the midst of their anger and frustration with each other Maria is still willing to accept that in order to comment upon your world you have to be able to borrow from it, even from the parts of it that are not explicitly 'yours'. She insists that this alone does not make appropriation a negative force: within a construct of art appropriation should be seen as the positive genesis, the point of creation. Maria is not so naive as to think however that this artistic 'magpieing' can exist in isolation from the other cultural dynamics of our world:

> Maria — Seventy-five percent of the art that's out there steals, but it doesn't give anything back. It doesn't bring you joy. It doesn't heal you. It doesn't make you ask questions. It doesn't do anything. It takes your stuff and it hangs it up on the wall and it says, 'Look what I've done. Isn't that wonderful. I'm an artist.'[116]

It is this latter kind of art that she is accusing Linda of being involved in. An art that steals without respect: art that is not respectful to the "honour among thieves".[117]

The complication here is that in order to mirror, or take from, a culture of any kind one has to have contact with it. As soon as that contact is initiated both the culture and the artist have been irrevocably changed by it. This belies the possibility of ever just being an observer; to be observed, and to observe, is to be acted upon and hence changed. Again, I wish to avoid the solely negative connotation to this reality of intercultural work.[118] Change can be a positive

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116 Griffiths and Campbell. 83.
117 Griffiths and Campbell. 82.
118 I am using the term intercultural here to mean more than a culture as suggested by race. I consider Women's Circle to be included in this definition for example, because it crossed boundaries between different 'women's cultures'.

force: a movement towards greater understanding and equality. Of course the danger, and in too many cases the reality, is that this interchange too often exploits one party for the material, spiritual or emotional gain of the other. It is this history of cultural exploitation within which Maria is contextualising Linda's work. Each of the projects outlined in this work could be identified as popular theatre because of their origins in personal story and their desire to effect some kind of social change through their presentation. I think that this leaves them particularly wide open to accusations of cultural appropriation (except perhaps in the case of Sally's Rape where, as I have already mentioned, the stories on stage were the actors' own - unless Robbie could be accused of an historical appropriation) exactly because they are openly using stories from very specific communities and deliberately taking those stories back to the communities that provided them. In some ways this makes for a more honest process if for no other reason than that the cultural 'stealing' is admittedly a part of the process. In Maria's words, quoted above, there is reason to hope and assume that the work taken back to the community will be involved in a process of enlightenment and healing.

Again I find myself asking where this kind of discussion leaves us as artists, and particularly myself as an actor. In the past year I have been involved, amongst other things, in two productions where I have represented Shakespearean queens: a reality that is far from my own experience. Is this more reasonable because I am appropriating an experience that is of greater privilege than my own? Can art only steal 'dishonourably' from those in less powerful positions? Of course, the context and history within which a Shakespearean queen is represented has to be contexualised. Shakespeare has an unmistakable position of privilege within theatrical history: one that is not going to be displaced by one new representation of any of his characters. In fact, it is hard to

imagine any theatrical reference to Shakespeare, no matter how critical or dishonourable, being anything other than a confirmation of the status of his work. In addition, British queens are a subject matter frequently found upon the stage. In comparison, when Native content, for example, has been absent from the stage, or if present only represented by white people, the stakes involved in presenting a character such as Jessica are considerably higher. With such a minimal observance of Native content generally, every one performance becomes crucial in its presentation of the Native community. Obviously then the reality of appropriation moves beyond just class and each case has to be observed within its context and history. This is one of the reasons that 'legislating' such work is impossible.[119]

I do believe that appropriation and exploitation are intrinsically linked to dynamics of power. In fact an 'appropriation' of a culture that is more dominant, especially such appropriation within art, is often lauded as resistance to oppression or absorption by that culture: it is a necessary 'aping' in order to contextualise the cultural power dynamics that are in place. This is the premise of much Guerrilla or Invisible theatre. In this kind of work, actors create a theatrical event publicly (usually the observers are unaware, at least initially, that the event is theatrical) in order to expose some systemic oppression or power dynamic. In order for the power relationships to be exposed at least one actor is usually representing the privileged person within the dynamic. For example, an actor may play an abusive employer chastising her employees in a working situation where labour disputes are being silenced by management. This is seen as 'political' art: a counter-hegemonic act. Does that make the appropriation any more honourable?

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119 Many theorists working in the area of representation and cultural appropriation have been influential on my thinking here. See Interculturalism and Performance for a survey of work being done in this area.

The answer to all of these questions of honour seems to boil down to something as nebulous as 'respect'. It is 'respect' and "responsibility" that Maria cites as the difference between "bad" art and "true" art.[120] It is respect that underpins the relationship between Robbie and Jeannie and that brings Jeannie to the realisation that she cannot genuinely represent Robbie's history on the slave block. It is also respectfully that she involves herself in the telling of Uncle Buck's death, taking on the voice of a slave. However, in Woman's Circle Sandra's representation of Carol was also respectful and responsibly executed yet I argued that it was potentially not the most powerful tool for initiating a true dialogue. How do we measure and acknowledge this respect? How do we know if it is present or not? And how do we know if it is enough to prevent the art that we are involved in creating from defying the honour between thieves? As I write this I am reminded of my own speculations about the 'Christian' mentality we thought we were observing in the students at TERRA. I feel that it was exactly their respect of us and the work we were doing that silenced a genuine response to Carol. At what point does the requirement for respect itself turn into an oppression? At one point in The Book of Jessica, Linda says:

> Linda I knew I was getting a kind of racism, and I knew somehow I was putting out a kind of racism, but I didn't know what it was. Maybe my racism was in not accepting that there would be racism.[121]

In reference to her discovery, maybe respect is acknowledging, to the best of our abilities, the assumptions we enter a process with and the exploitations we inevitably enact during it. Acknowledgment is not enough (in the same way that

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120 Griffiths and Campbell. 83.
121 Griffiths and Campbell. 34.

Linda's recognition of racism does not erase the racism), but it is a place from which to begin.

Additionally fear of cultural appropriation speaks to a fear of absorption into a dominant whole. Just as this fear is an issue within art and creative projects, so is it an issue in cultural movements such as feminism. The 'representation' that is feared in feminism is one that sees 'women' homogenised to a single, dominant representation. As I charted in the introductory chapter this is a fear of the erasure of difference. In the cases of both the artistic and the feminist movements (and especially the intersection of the two) the answers have been focused around placing clearer markers around the boundaries that differentiate: isolating one group from another, women from women and artists from potential subjects. Although understanding this movement I do not believe it to be the solution and thankfully see projects, such as the ones outlined in this work (all of them intersections between cultural movements and art), beginning to address a new way forward through the fears and dangers of intercultural work.

The common thread running through each of these pieces is a commitment to a process of dialogue. Again and again the importance of not just talking, but truly connecting with each other through dialogue was the crux of the relationships between these women: whether the dialogue between creators, between performers themselves or between performers and audience members. Robbie's insistence that dialogue is itself an active force, a drive forward, appears to be substantiated in each of these works. Not that dialogue is in itself is an easy thing to define, partly because it moves beyond the colloquial understanding of 'talking to'. One difference is the emphasis on 'listening to' as well: something that Robbie and Jeannie model so successfully in Sally's Rape.

If respect is the basis of non-exploitative appropriation, then maybe respect is also at the crux of true dialogue. Again, as with respect, 'dialogue' is nebulous and impossible to insist upon, but fundamental to any work that attempts to embrace difference. If difference is to remain not just a fact but a celebrated inclusion in work between women (be they artists, activists, academics or all three) then there has to be a respect for that difference. In this instance respect translates for me into an acknowledgment that the differences will potentially create difficulties but that ultimately they are a more viable force when visible than when erased.

As I come to the end of this work two publications catch my attention, seemingly fated to coincide with this writing. The first is the Sept./Oct. 1995 edition of Aboriginal Voices: The Magazine of Evolving Native American Arts. In bold print on the front cover is the headline: "Native Theatre: We're in control". Inside Thompson Highway writes in his article entitled "Native theatre centre stage":

> (W)hat a privilege it's been to have witnessed the full entrance of professional "Native theatre," . . . onto the Canadian artistic scene this past decade or so, to have witnessed the emergence of so many talented Native actors and writers, in particular, but, with increasing frequency, designers, directors and other artists as well.[122]

Elsewhere in the journal there is a review of a new play by Maria Campbell, working this time in collaboration with another Metis writer to produce "One More Time", a "crazy mix of laughter and pain that are the stuff of Metis life".[123]

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122 Aboriginal Voices. 50.
123 Aboriginal Voices. 15.

These two articles felt like signs at the end of this writing process: signs that there is no end to the cultural movements documented here, that both Native theatre and its creators, such as Maria, will continue to find the ways in which their voices and cultures can best be represented by themselves. Also it appeared as a sign of confirmation that theatre is indeed a place of active reconfiguring of cultural theory and assumption: a playground in which to explore and a stage upon which to act out new possibilities, new identities, new discoveries about ourselves.

I was also aware in reading this article that the passing of the cultural moment that created Jessica has resulted in an isolation for the Native community, albeit a necessary one at this point. We have Canadian theatre journals that mention very little Native theatre and we have Native theatre journals that mention nothing beyond the Native artistic scene. I feel a certain sadness as I resign myself to the necessity of this separation. I also feel a frustration to move beyond it to a place of greater connection.

The second publication was an article in The Edmonton Journal[124] that referred to the much publicised recent change of president of the National Action Committee on the Status of Women. The retiring president, Sunera Thobani, used her farewell speech to review the work that she had done at the head of NAC in the past year. Primarily this work included increasing the membership and profile of women of colour in the organisation. As I mentioned previously, Sunera came under heavy criticism from mainstream members of the organisation who felt that foregrounding the issue of race was evading the more pertinent issues facing Canadian women. Sunera's belief that finding ways to include women of colour *was* the pertinent issue amongst Canadian women seemed to be upheld by the NAC membership when they voted Joan Grant-

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124 Edmonton Journal. Monday June 17 1996 A3.

Cummings as incoming president. Joan is a black woman of Jamaican descent whose platform stated her belief that a second woman of colour as President could more easily continue Sunera's work of making NAC more accessible to *all* Canadian women.

This confirmation of the pain and celebration of addressing difference between women seemed a fitting end to this writing. It leaves the work of dialogue in the hands of competent women who are dedicating their lives to finding the ways that difference becomes a positive and visible force among women. These articles together seem to represent our current cultural location - identifying as they do the need for cultural autonomy simultaneous to the need for a united voice that avoids erasing difference. None of them have solutions, but all are engaged in the dialogue - respectfully.

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